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The RED CROSS GIRLS *in the* NATIONAL CAPITAL

MARGARET VANDERCOOK

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"You Know I Care For You More Than You Can Appreciate"

The Red Cross Girls At the National Capital

By

MARGARET VANDERCOOK

Author of "The Ranch Girls Series," "Stories about Camp Fire Girls Series," etc.

Illustrated

The John C. Winston Company

Philadelphia

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THE RED CROSS GIRLS AT THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

CHAPTER I

An Emergency

THE tiny room in the New York tenement was crowded with noisy, gesticulating people. Scarcely more than eight feet square, it yet had a table in a corner where a man and woman and a girl and two children were seated, while by the single window was a young man in the uniform of a United States soldier. He was leaning forward with an arm outstretched and his face concealed in his arm.

The girl at the table laughed.

"Oh, do be quiet, or at least try to make a little less racket," the voice proceeded from the soldier. "It is bad enough to be

ill in a place like this! I thought some one was going to the hospital to ask for help."

Arising, the young fellow walked with difficulty across the floor to the farther side of the small chamber. It was now between six and seven o'clock in the evening upon a late February day. A single gas jet burned in the room, where there was a pungent odor of cooking. The air was thick and stale and warm.

"I did send the children to the hospital to-day and have sent them several times. I went myself to the settlement and everybody promises help. But they say they are so busy they can't do more than they can. I think it's good of us to have *her* here at all, and we can't be expected not to talk and maybe sometimes to laugh. She ain't anything to us."

The soldier let his glance drop.

Lying upon a couch was a young girl of about fifteen or sixteen years old; she had the hair that is golden in some lights and silver in others, it was so surprisingly fair. At the moment her eyes were closed and her cheeks flushed. Now and then making

a little restless movement, she uttered a sound that was half a sigh, half a moan.

"Yes, it is kind of you, mother. There are enough of us already packed in these rooms with me loafing all the time and waiting to get strong enough to go back to work. I thought when the war was ended and I was home my troubles would be over! But even if this girl *was* a stranger to us, we could not let her be put out on the streets, and too sick to know what was happening to her. Yet that was going to take place, as she had not paid her rent in two weeks before she was ill. The landlord told me he was not going to wait any longer and said if the hospitals would not take care of her, he did not consider it his business what became of her."

The girl at the table, evidently a sister, answered good-naturedly:

"I'm sorry if my laughing makes things worse. You are changed since you came back from the war, Tim. I suppose being wounded and seeing what the fellows had to go through over there would make a difference. But don't worry, some one

will come from the Neighborhood House this evening. I stopped there myself the last thing on my way from work and explained that a young girl had been taken sick in the room next ours and had no one to look after her. I told them we did not know who she was, as she had not been living in our tenement long and kept to herself. There were several girls at the Settlement wearing Red Cross uniforms, the same uniforms one used to see during the war. Two of them promised to come here as soon as they could find a vacant bed in any of the city hospitals. I am sure they will keep their word."

Timothy Brackett appeared less anxious, although still looking down at the girl on the cot, who seemed entirely unconscious of her surroundings.

"It is strange not to know her name!" he murmured, speaking to himself rather than to any member of his family. "I suppose as soon as she is well she will be able to explain why she was living alone in a place like this. I wish I had asked her name the day we stopped and talked for

a few moments in the hall. She wanted to know then if I was well enough to go back to work, or was I taking the Vocational Training the Government is offering the disabled soldiers? I told her I did not think much of one's chance, because the fellows I knew had not had any luck and so I had not tried to put in my claim. She told me I was making a mistake and she thought I ought to study and do better than I had before the war because that is what the United States promised her wounded men."

"Do you think she is an American, Tim?"

The young man smiled.

"More American than we are, Mollie! I do wish those Red Cross nurses would turn up, if they promised they would come they are sure to be here. When the men were ill in the hospitals abroad and the nurses made them promises, the promises were kept even in the midst of an air raid or a barrage."

There was a silence then and only an old clock ticked on in a monotonous fashion.

The man at the table, pulling a pipe

from his pocket, began to smoke; there was a strong contrast between him and his son.

Glancing toward the older man, Timothy Brackett opened his lips to speak again and then hesitated. His father was not unkind, but he had been out of work through the closing down of a shipbuilding yard where he had been employed during the war, and had not wished to allow the young girl who had been taken ill into their overcrowded quarters.

Limping over to a table, the soldier returned to his patient with a glass of water and kneeling beside her tried to persuade the girl on the pallet to drink. He thought he recalled the fashion in which his Red Cross nurse had lifted him after he was carried wounded to the hospital near Château-Thierry. But apparently nursing was not so simple as it appeared, as his patient now showed no sign of knowing what he wished her to do.

She looked so young and pathetic and the boy saw she was totally unsuited to her present surroundings. What odd chance

could have brought a young girl who showed unmistakable evidences of refinement and education to live even for a few weeks alone in an East Side tenement? He was accustomed to the place himself and had never lived anywhere else until the two years spent in France. But even to him after his return the East Side appeared worse than he recalled it. Human beings should not be expected to live in such overcrowded quarters. He and his sister were fairly well educated and had often talked of getting the family away from the present neighborhood, and yet here he was a useless drag on his family since his release from the hospital. With his father out of work, there was no money to depend upon except his sister's small wages.

At this moment there was a knock at the door.

Timothy Brackett got up from his knees as promptly as he could manage and almost instinctively his hand went to his forehead in a military salute.

Standing outside the door were two Red

Cross nurses wearing the same character of uniforms they had worn overseas. To the former American soldier they looked as much like ministering angels as they often had in the past.

The older one stepped quickly forward, ignoring everyone else in the room. She had hazel eyes, a long delicate nose, and thin lips with irregular white teeth. Her hair was cut short and fell even with the line of her face.

To the Brackett family, who were originally Irish although the younger members of the family were born in the United States, she had a strange, although fascinating appearance. In spite of paying no attention to them, they experienced no sensation of embarrassment before her.

The younger Red Cross nurse produced an opposite effect.

Never in her life had Bianca Zoli been able to conquer her own shyness, which so long as she could remember had been mistaken for coldness. Moreover, she looked extraordinarily young and pretty for her present task.

"We are trying to help with the emergency work at the Neighborhood House," she explained while Nora Jamison was taking the temperature of the little patient whose appearance was so unexpected in the midst of her surroundings. "We intended being here earlier. But we have been trying for hours to discover a bed in any hospital in the city or the nursing homes. I understood you wished the patient taken away immediately."

Nora Jamison glanced up from her examination of the invalid.

"She *must* be taken away and at once, Bianca, but as we have no place to take her, what are we to do?"

Bianca hesitated and in the same instant glanced at the group of half a dozen faces surrounding her.

The man of the family and his wife were standing, the two children clinging to the mother's skirts. The older girl, who must have been about seventeen or eighteen, was staring fixedly toward her. She had a coarse, dark face with bright blue eyes. The brother, still wearing a

shabby uniform, looked greatly superior to any member of his family. Unusually tall, he was now stooping a little and seemed slightly lame. In spite of his strong, large features, he had a thin, white look, as of one who had been suffering from too long and trying a convalescence.

"Is there no place in this house, no single room we could rent? We are Red Cross nurses and would trouble no one else with the care of the girl. I am afraid she is very ill."

Bianca spoke directly to the young soldier. He shook his head.

"No, there is no single spot. I am afraid you do not understand how crowded the East Side of New York is. You have never been in this neighborhood before, have you?"

The Red Cross nurse shook her head. An instant later, moving noiselessly, she also kneeled down beside the girl on the couch, studying her intently.

"There is only one thing to do, Nora. Dr. David has promised to be here in a few moments and I am sure will say as I do

that we must take this child, whoever she is, home to Sonya."

"But Mrs. Clark has not finished moving into her new house and is expecting visitors; and, Bianca, we never saw this young girl before. Except that she is very ill, we are not sure what is the trouble," Nora Jamison whispered, at the same time making her new patient as comfortable as possible by gently bathing her face, after having persuaded her to drink the water vainly proffered a few moments before.

Bianca Zoli frowned.

"I know, Nora, and it does seem a good deal to ask of Sonya, but there is an empty room in our new house and you and I will be able to undertake the nursing. I wonder how many girls Sonya has rescued before this one? One more will make but little difference! And this girl seems so ill and lonely and in need of friends."

Nora Jamison nodded.

"I wish I had my own little apartment, then I'd gladly take her with me. I am alone now and have no responsibilities

unless my little French Jeanne joins me."

A quarter of an hour later, the strange young girl who had been found ill in an East Side tenement was being driven through the streets of New York City by Dr. David Clark, one of the most distinguished surgeons in the United States Army during the great war. They were accompanied by the two Red Cross girls, Bianca Zoli and Nora Jamison.

So sure was Dr. Clark of his wife's reception of the young girl to whom New York offered no other shelter that he had not telephoned.

As a physician he knew that the present case was urgent.

Among the conditions in which he had just discovered her there was no chance of saving the girl's life, and although Dr. Clark was a man of action and not of imagination, nevertheless it had struck even him that there was something incongruous in the contrast between his new patient and the place in which she had been living. Plainly the girl was of gentle breeding and had been delicately reared,

so that some odd train of circumstances must have brought her to misfortune.

A few moments before reaching the front door of his new home on Park Avenue, Dr. Clark smiled to himself in the darkness.

"I assured Sonya that being married to a physician would not be an easy life. I don't believe I dreamed how much we would pass through together! Now the war is over, I had promised us both she should not be drawn into my work as she has been, and yet here am I bringing her a new and unknown responsibility to-night."

CHAPTER II

Midcurrents

THE drawing-room was not yet furnished. In the center of the floor a rug had been placed and a number of comfortable and beautiful chairs were drawn up around the fireplace. Behind them was a wide mahogany table holding half a dozen books and magazines and a drawing-room lamp with a rose shade.

Seated near the table with a book in her hand was a woman, whom at a first glance one might have regarded as near middle age, but at a second glance as a great deal younger, for while her hair was white the outline of her face was singularly youthful.

Not especially interested in what she was reading, now and then she glanced up from the pages of her book as if listening for the return of some one. And one saw that her eyes were almost startlingly blue, shaded by singularly dark lashes.

"I must confess I do not object to being left to my own resources for the greater part of the day, especially with a new house to be put in order, but when evening comes I should like one or two members of my family with me," she murmured. "However, I suppose I am selfish. When one volunteered for Red Cross work during the war how little one was able to realize the number of responsibilities that lay ahead! With the close of war and our return from Coblenz, our Red Cross work was ended. Yet scarcely one of the Red Cross girls who were with me in Europe appears willing to lay aside her efforts. The Red Cross Service of Peace holds nearly as much promise for future work as the service of war," Sonya Clark concluded, straining her ears to catch the sound of an approaching motor car.

Rising, she then walked to her drawing-room window, where there were no curtains at any of the windows, although the shades were drawn.

Raising one of the blinds, Sonya looked out into the street.

Her new home faced Park Avenue, now piled with banks of snow from a recent storm. Across on the farther side of the street the lights were shining in other handsome houses and in splendid apartments. Beautiful cars were passing up and down the street, an occasional man or woman wearing an evening costume hurried past, intending to enter one of the near-by homes. Yet the street seemed singularly quiet to the woman at the window.

"What a change in one's life these past few months of being at home have wrought after nearly five years of war and war-stricken Europe!" she said speaking aloud. "In all that time seldom have I glanced out a window at any scene remotely resembling this one. Yet how often in the occasional moments of rest during our Red Cross work abroad I used to try to catch a glimpse of the country or the sky. To-night I see a picture of a wide stretch of barren country, cold under the moon, and overhead, between me and the stars, a giant battle going on in the air. I wonder how long I watched that night before our

American aviators were victorious? Now I must remember never to speak of any of these past experiences save to the Red Cross girls. I am told that American people already are weary of hearing of the war and will read no books and see no plays that bear any reference to it. Well, I wonder if this is true of the men and women, the girls and boys, who were together 'over there'? Surely even if we do not speak we shall never forget! But there, I have grown weary of my own reminiscences and do wish my husband and the girls would return. It must be nine o'clock. What a stupid story I have been attempting to read!"

Turning from the window, Sonya Clark started to re-cross the room when a sound outside attracted her attention, or rather the sudden ending of a noise. A small motor had drawn up and was stopping directly in front of the house. She recognized the car as her husband's.

In another moment he had stepped out of the car. Instead of Nora Jamison and Bianca Zoli following immediately, there

appeared to be a good deal of hesitation and confusion over their alighting.

Idly curious, Sonya was continuing to watch when she observed her husband lean inside the car. The instant after he appeared to be holding in his arms a figure wrapped in a dark, soft garment which made the outline difficult to discern. Then, before Sonya could move, the two girls in their Red Cross uniforms were out on the sidewalk trying to be of assistance. Later the entire group moved up toward the house.

Sonya was there in readiness upon their arrival, with the front door stretched hospitably open.

"What in the world, David!" she exclaimed, and then went quickly to the long sofa in the hall, half covered with unwrapped pictures and parcels, to make a place for the figure Dr. Clark was carrying in his arms.

You have not picked up any one in the street who has been run over?" she demanded. You did not by any chance injure any one yourself?"

As Dr. David Clark deposited his burden he shook his head.

"I cannot explain very well now, Sonya. I want to know if we may use one of the vacant rooms upstairs for this child for a few days until I can find some other place for her. She has not been injured, but she is very ill."

With a little nod, Sonya spoke softly to the two girls, Bianca Zoli and Nora Jamison.

"The room in the front up on the third floor has a bed in it and will be quieter than any other. Will you girls see that everything is in readiness? I don't think there will be any special difficulty in getting this little girl you have rescued upstairs, as she seems very frail."

An hour later, Sonya Clark, Dr. Clark and Bianca Zoli were in the drawing-room and this time the three of them were seated about the fire in various attitudes of semi-repose.

"I hope, Sonya, it will not be too much of an interruption to you in getting the house settled to have a patient unexpectedly thrust upon you," Dr. Clark remarked.

"One could perhaps appreciate the problem of trying to find a place for a wounded soldier in our overcrowded hospitals in France, but not to be able to find a refuge in a great city like New York for a stray little girl who appears to have neither friends nor home is well-nigh incredible."

Sonya shook her head.

"Overcrowding appears to be one of the many problems of the world at present! But don't worry over me! I am glad enough to have the strange little girl with us for a time; in fact, I have been feeling selfish with this large house on our hands and knowing the difficulties other people are having to find homes. Besides, the girl's story, or perhaps one should say her lack of story, is interesting. You say you found her with a poor Irish family in an East Side tenement? She does not look in the least as if she belonged there. Moreover, Bianca and Nora both offer to relieve me entirely of the nursing, and I presume when our other Red Cross girls hear of our present situation there will be other volunteers. Bianca, will you please answer

the telephone, I am sure I heard it ringing?"

A few moments later Bianca returned to the drawing-room.

"It is Nona who is ringing, Sonya," she explained. "Nona says she realizes that it is late, but may she and Captain Martin stop in and speak to you and Dr. David for a few moments? They have something most important they wish to tell you."

"Yes, tell them to hurry, as I am curious to know," Sonya answered, casting an amused glance at her husband, who had made no protest but wore an expression suggesting he might have preferred an hour alone to so late visitors.

A few months before Dr. David Clark and Mrs. Clark and a number of the Red Cross girls had returned from the city of Coblenz, where they had been for some time after the close of the war with the American Army of Occupation. Soon after the marriage of Nona Davis and Captain John Martin had been quietly celebrated in the home of her friend and co-worker, Mildred Thornton. Mildred's own mar-

riage to Lieutenant Wainwright was to occur in the approaching spring.

But Nona and Captain Martin had been through many misunderstandings and many vicissitudes and so were unwilling to wait a day longer than necessary. Indeed, ever since Captain Martin had in a measure recovered his sight, after an injury in a gallant action to save his own men from disaster in France, he and Nona had planned to marry as soon as Nona could give up her Red Cross work abroad. Captain Martin had refused to marry in spite of Nona's desire when he feared for himself a future of blindness.

A quarter of an hour after the ringing of the telephone at Dr. Clark's, a young woman entered the only partly furnished drawing-room, followed by a man in the uniform of a United States officer. He looked a good deal older than his companion. He moved slowly and had his hand resting upon her arm and yet was able to recognize the faces of his friends.

Dr. Clark shook hands with Captain Martin, leading him to a chair, while Nona

Martin, who had been Nona Davis, put her arms about Mrs. Clark. She and Sonya had been devoted friends, and indeed the girl and woman owed much to each other's friendship in their past history.

"In truth, Sonya, I cannot grow accustomed to being separated from you! It has been ten days since we saw each other, has it not? But I have understood that you were busy with your new house and Jack and I were trying to reach a definite decision before we confided in you or Dr. David. After we were married you know Jack and I planned a long holiday. He had been through so much, first with the fighting and then his terrible injury and so little hope of recovery. And I, well, nearly five years I spent as a Red Cross nurse upon every allied battlefront in Europe one after the other; so I believed I too had earned a vacation. Yet the trouble is, Sonya, that after our few months of leisure, of seeing friends and enjoying New York, we have already grown tired of it. Why, every time I pass one of our soldiers on the street, if he

happens not to look happy and vigorous as he should, I want to stop and talk it over and do something for him. Recently I have taken to visiting the convalescent hospitals, which has helped some. My husband seems more anxious even than I, but, Jack, will you explain what we have decided?"

"Why, yes," Captain Martin answered, "although the details of what we intend are still indefinite. I think Dr. Clark and Mrs. Clark will both understand why for many reasons I want to work for a time among the soldiers whose eyes have been injured or destroyed by the war. During the months when I faced a future of darkness I learned many things, some of them practical and some of a different character. Then Fate was kinder to me than I hoped and I can see again. Now I want more than anything else in the world to help the other fellows who have been less fortunate."

There was a brief silence in the room.

Then Dr. Clark reached over and took the younger man's hand.

"May I say that I congratulate you

and envy you and believe you have done the right and the splendid thing. It is odd how difficult it is to return to everyday life after our service in Europe. I am doing my best to feel my former interest in my New York City practice, yet I confess there are many hours when, were it not for Sonya, I want nothing else but to continue to look after the boys who are not yet cured of their wounds."

"And why am I a barrier?" Sonya inquired, glancing at no one, not even her husband, but toward the leaping flames in the grate.

"Why, because you have had enough of hard times and of Red Cross work, Sonya, and you and Bianca deserve your own home amid pleasant surroundings, which I could not afford as a Red Cross doctor."

Sonya continued to look at the fire.

"So that is your reason? Well, I have my own confession to make. In these past weeks when I have been attempting to set my new house in order all the time I have had a vision of a different character of home; instead of a city house on Fifth

Avenue, a big, rambling country place with a wide veranda, flower beds in front of the house, a kitchen garden, a stream, perhaps a view of the hills and the sea and sky. And in and out my house and garden are soldiers not yet recovered from their wounds, growing strong and well again. I have even in my own mind given my house a name. It is called 'The House of the Golden Wish.' The wish is that we may do for our soldiers what they have done for us, give them peace and prosperity and a new future, with the world of their own choosing like an open road before them."

CHAPTER III

"The House of the Golden Wish"

THE house itself was gray, the silver gray wrought by atmosphere, by winds and water and the sun.

It faced a great river possibly about a quarter of a mile away, although the grounds surrounding the house came nearly down to the river's bank. This afternoon in April the trees were everywhere in bud about the place, save those which were in blossom. The snowball bushes hung weighted with crystal balls, the lilacs waved lavender crests, the wide bushes with small flowers the color of henna and of indescribable sweetness, the calycanthus, outrivaled the fragrance of the other flowers.

Over the lawn, green with the perfect spring-time greenness, tulip and hyacinth beds made splashes of radiant color.

Walking about the grounds were a dozen or more soldiers still wearing their uniforms, and four or five girls.

"This is the most beautiful place in the world and I feel sure that if a fellow can't get well here he is past hope. When he is transplanted heaven will look a good deal like it."

"But, Major Jimmie, that is too great a compliment even for 'The House of the Golden Wish,' " Sonya Clark remonstrated, addressing a young American officer, protesting and yet looking as if she agreed with him.

The young officer was seated in a wheeled chair facing the river. He had a round boyish face, brown eyes and hair of nearly the same shade. Yet the bones of his face showed too plainly and there were hollows in his cheeks and shadows under his eyes.

"But suppose I never had met you and Dr. Clark in France, Mrs. Clark, and never become your friends when we were stationed in Coblenz? Do you know I was invalided home to the United States with scarcely an intimate friend here to welcome me? Until I was ordered to France I had spent a good many years at West Point and after

my mother's death lost touch with my friends in my old home. Now to be with my Red Cross friends again is better luck than I hoped for. Tell me, won't you, how you and Dr. Clark managed to acquire this enchanted place and how you have brought together so many of your former Red Cross nurses and your old hospital staff?"

"Are you sure it would not tire you to hear the story, Major Hersey?" Sonya queried. "It is a better story than a fairy story that I have to tell, since it is a human story and human kindness and generosity are more valuable than fairy gold.

"You see, when our Red Cross staff, which had been together so long in Europe, first returned home to the United States, we had no other plan than to separate and go our so very different ways, meeting now and then when we could for the sake of old times, yet each one of us firmly determined to go back to the kind of life known before the war. My husband arranged to resign and to re-establish the wealthy practice

in New York City he had before the need for his services by the Government. I was to keep house and at a rather late season in an unconventional existence I was at last to take my proper place in society. A worth-while thing to do, and entirely appropriate to a successful physician's wife, but may I unburden myself to you? The prospect weighed upon me as a nightmare. I did not like to confess this even to my husband, but I was originally a Russian woman before I became an American citizen and had been through many experiences which I never felt were the proper background for the life which seemed to lie ahead of me. In my heart of hearts I was frightened and a little bored. Then one night, quite by accident, I discovered that Dr. Clark had no longer any wish to regain his fashionable practice and was only resigning from the Red Cross for my sake. It is extraordinary, Major Jimmie, and if you marry, please remember what I tell you. The people in this world who are most intimate and most devoted are those who most often fail in confidence with each other,

one fearing to disappoint or wound the other. I had no desire for money; I have already possessed it and given it up for things which I cared more about."

"Yet a place such as this represents a fortune, Mrs. Clark. Surely the United States government is not taking care of her disabled soldiers in the luxury and beauty of surroundings such as these," Major James Hersey protested, allowing his glance to wander over the splendid lawn to the house set like a silver jewel in its midst.

Sonya Clark laughed.

"No, the circumstance is unusual, and I confess not strictly in accordance with military arrangements. But Dr. Clark and I, perhaps through influence, or maybe this time the fairies, are working under what I can only describe as a special dispensation. This wonderful place is a gift, or rather a loan, to be devoted to the purpose of bringing back health and vigor to as many disabled soldiers as we can accommodate. The place is the property of an extremely wealthy, elderly man, Colonel Churchill.

He was not satisfied with his gifts to the Red Cross during the war, or at least did not consider his obligation at an end. He had no son to go across and was too old to go himself, and now says this place is offered to us for its present use in memory of the son he never had, for the service of the boys who are living under his roof and are now his sons by adoption. But I won't go into all the details, except to say that Dr. Clark and Colonel Churchill saw each other a number of times to make the necessary arrangements. As Colonel Churchill has great influence in Washington, it was agreed that we care for a limited number of disabled soldiers who otherwise might be neglected. As soon as we learned you had been invalided home from Coblenz, Dr. Clark was able to write immediately and ask you if you cared to come to us."

Major Jimmie Hersey smiled gratefully.

"Lucky fellow that I am! I thought when I was ordered home from my work as an officer with the American troops on the Rhine that I was the unluckiest man alive. Now I am not so sure. Whether I

pull through or not, I shall always be glad to have been with my former Red Cross friends. By the way, Mrs. Clark, you have so many of the Red Cross girls here with you near the National Capital, do you know what has become of the young Countess Charlotta Scherin who ran away so unceremoniously from her home in Luxemburg rather than marry the elderly German? Her one desire, she used to tell me, was to become an American Red Cross girl."

During his interrogation Major Jimmie was smiling and yet as his eyes rested on the great American River not many yards away, he was seeing a mental vision of another river, the Rhine, which at that time lay in an enemy country. He was saying good-by to the same youthful little Countess of whose whereabouts he had learned nothing. Yet in parting she had said to him and he could still recall almost her exact words: "Good-by, I shall look forward to our meeting again."

"Oh, Charlotta Scherin may appear any day to see us," Sonya answered. She is

at present traveling through the United States and I am afraid leading her English chaperon, poor Miss Susan Pringle, a somewhat exhausting life. Charlotta and Bianca are devoted friends and write each other frequently. Now I must say good-by to you for the present as I am expecting another of my Red Cross girls at any moment. I don't know whether you remember her, Theodosia Thompson, a Kentucky girl, who was with us in Coblenz. She confided to us there that she hated nursing and as soon as she could return home wished to undertake the work she loved. She has been studying since, professional dancing, I believe, and recitation. Nevertheless, I received an imploring letter from her the other day saying she wanted to make a confession. She too cannot make up her mind to surrender her Red Cross work altogether and wished to learn if I could make her useful. We are to talk over the situation together this afternoon. When you are tired and wish to come into the house, signal and one of the soldiers or one of the Red Cross girls will help you."

"Sorry to be such a nuisance!" Major Hersey muttered, feeling the anger that always afflicted him at the thought of his present helplessness, it being a part of his cure that he should remain quiet nearly all the time.

Then as Sonya Clark moved away and he turned from surveying her handsome, graceful presence to look at the little group approaching him from an opposite direction, he experienced a sensation of self-reproach. After all he was not so badly off, even if he never got well, as lots of the other fellows who had fought side by side with him! At the present moment he saw Bianca Zoli walking between two soldiers with a hand slipped in an arm of each one of them to keep them from stumbling. Walking beside them was Captain Jack Martin with his wife, who had been Nona Davis. He had met her in Europe. They were talking together. Behind them only a few feet away was a much younger girl, slight and delicate, whom Major Hersey had not seen before.

"I must some day ask Bianca Zoli to tell

me what news she has had from the Countess Charlotta. I remember they were devoted to each other and think the impetuous little Countess and I owed our original intimacy to Bianca Zoli's illness. Curious if we should meet again! Perhaps better not—for me! However, I won't attempt to ask questions until I see Miss Zoli alone."

The young officer nodded and called out greetings to the small group, who, answering, then passed on.

A half hour and still he remained outdoors.

Several of his soldier friends had stopped to inquire if he did not wish to be wheeled into the house, but always Major Hersey had shaken his head.

Indoors he was apt to grow restless from so much sitting still, but outdoors, particularly on this exquisite spring afternoon, there was too much that was lovely to see and hear to think of oneself. About a blossoming cherry tree, over toward the left of the garden where the orchard lay, a blue bird darted, making little homing excursions before settling down for the night.

A pair of Baltimore orioles were lingering near a clump of lilac bushes not far off.

Farther away Jimmie Hersey became aware of a low bird-like note of a character he felt sure he had never heard before. It was sweet and clear and high. And it came from lower down nearer the ground than one would have expected.

Puzzled and interested, the young officer sat up, leaning farther out of his chair and wishing he were not in honor bound to remain where he was. However, to have pursued this particular low musical call would probably have been to have lost it. And it was coming nearer.

A few moments later, a girl in a green dress with a short skirt and coat and wearing agreen tam-o'-shanter, placed her hands on a low fence rail between the orchard and the garden of the great house and vaulted lightly over it. And at this instant the music ceased.

"Major Hersey, you don't remember me, and I have not had a chance to speak to you before! I am so glad you are here to grow strong again with Dr. and Mrs. Clark.

I am Nora Jamison. We met in Coblenz. You recall that you once warned me not to come to the German home where you were quartered. Yet I would come because I thought there was something I wished to find out."

"Well I remember! And you did find out and saved the American Army of Occupation from a lot of nonsense. Are you still a Red Cross nurse, Miss Jamison?"

Nora nodded.

"Yes, but this is my afternoon of freedom and I have been for a long walk along the river bank."

"And was it you I heard whistling, or was it singing? I could not tell which it was."

Nora Jamison smiled.

"Neither, or both. I have been practicing an old trick I once had. I used to be able to persuade the birds to come to me. You see, I was brought up out west in the California woods and lived like a little savage."

"And were you successful this afternoon? Can you persuade the birds not to fear you?

Try, won't you, with those orioles over there in the lilacs? I'll keep as still as if I were a stone image."

The young officer spoke with more excitement and pleasure than he had felt in some time.

He had forgotten Nora Jamison completely until she recalled her existence to him and had not liked her especially in their former brief acquaintance, had considered her too odd and fanciful. Well, she was that still, with her short bobbed hair, her gray-green eyes under their dark lashes and her long, sensitive nose.

"I fear I shall not be successful. I have only half succeeded once or twice this afternoon, but nearly always I have failed. Still if you think it might entertain you and you won't mind keeping absolutely still?"

With a little nod, Nora Jamison dropped down upon the ground a few feet from the invalided American officer. In a purely unconscious fashion she crossed her feet under her and tilted her head to one side, now apparently oblivious of the presence of any human companion.

Puckering her lips she uttered the clear sweet call which had attracted the young officer's attention less than a quarter of an hour before.

He did continue perfectly quiet and yet his eyes turned from the quaint figure of the girl before him to the two birds in the near-by lilac bush.

What title was it the other Red Cross nurses had bestowed upon this girl? "Peter Pan," Jimmie Hersey now recalled the name. At the same instant he saw the orioles pause in their own flutterings and appear to listen with almost the same degree of fascination which he himself experienced. But they were shy and fearful and plainly uninterested in extending their acquaintance among the human family.

A second, then a third time Nora Jamison attempted her plaintive, musical call. Then slipping her hand in the pocket of her coat she scattered a few crumbs along the ground near-by.

Glancing at each other appealingly, plainly the orioles were repeating: "Will you go if I go?"

Into this fresh call for mutual understanding and sympathy Nora Jamison now put an added note of appeal. Then the little brown birds splashed with pure gold swam forward almost as if they were hypnotized, stopped, nibbled at crumbs on the ground only a foot away. Then one bolder than the other perched in the girl's outstretched palm.

"I say, but that is a stunt!" Major Jimmie exclaimed, in his interest and pleasure forgetting the characteristics of a stone image. And instantly the spell was broken.

"I am sorry, Miss Jamison, upon my word, but I have broken my promise. Fine thing for an American soldier and officer to be obliged to confess."

"Yes, and in order to reveal my displeasure I am going to wheel you back to the house at once. It is growing too cold for one who has been ill to stay longer out of doors. As for my little exhibition, it was really over in any case. And when things are over the best way out is to have the actors disappear."

CHAPTER IV

An Interior

THE old house had been the property of many generations and was of three stories, long and rambling and with the addition of a left wing.

Ingenuity had been required for the proper arrangement of the place to meet its new and varied household. But in a measure Sonya's arrangements resembled the plans of one or two of the smaller hospitals in which she had been located during the war.

For herself and husband and the Red Cross girls the third floor was set apart. There was also a single guest room.

Exclusively reserved for the soldiers' use was the entire second floor with the large old-fashioned rooms turned into semi-dormitories in order to accommodate a larger number. Fortunately there were four or five small cottages about the place

for sleeping purposes and the vocational training. Yet the lower or first floor of the house was not materially altered; the great drawing-room with its wide French windows opening on to the veranda held the same assortment of furniture which had occupied the room for nearly a century, tall mahogany desks with bookcases above reaching nearly to the vaulted ceiling, horsehair sofas of rarely perfect design, an oval mahogany center table and several smaller ones, a dozen deep-seated arm chairs and smaller chairs of Sheraton or Chippendale design. The drawing-room was in reality two rooms with folding doors between. Yet these doors were seldom closed at the present time, having no purpose in being, since the room was used alike by all the residents of the great house. Across the hall a small room was devoted to visitors, or for personal confidences in case members of the household desired privacy.

The library was in the rear of this room, and when the house originally was loaned to Sonya and Dr. Clark for its present

purpose the library was musty with the odor of ancient leather volumes which had stood upon these self-same shelves unread and but infrequently dusted in many years.

However, the books recently had been taken down, cleaned and restored to their former positions by half a dozen of the soldiers. A surprising number of them were being read, although as a matter of fact the lower shelves containing several hundred of the later-day novels and biographies, and a gift from Barbara and Richard Thornton, were more popular.

The library contained only the pieces of furniture absolutely essential, a large table and a few comfortable leather chairs, and although there was no especial restraint about the noise that could be made in the other portions of the house, an unwritten law demanded silence in the library.

Across the entire back of the house ran the largest and most attractive of all the rooms, the dining-room, opening on to a back porch and commanding a view of the lawn sloping down to the river.

The kitchen was separate from the house

and connected with it by a covered archway; over the archway twisted and sprawled a century old grape vine, at this time of the year its leaves unfurling their gray-green fringe.

The old house boasted a ghost, in fact several ghosts, but since the arrival of so large a family as it held at present the ghosts must have regarded themselves as crowded out, as so far they had neither been seen nor heard.

This April morning three girls were setting the table for luncheon in the dining-room with the windows open and the door opening upon the back porch ajar.

Bianca Zoli placed a large flat bowl of jonquils and tulips in the center of the table and stood a few feet away gazing at it admiringly. The youngest of the girls was painstakingly placing the knives and forks and spoons in even rows. She had but lately received the necessary instructions with regard to her task and was by no means assured of her ability. The third girl occasionally removed a glass from the sideboard and placed it upon

the table, but plainly her mind was not upon her work as it should have been.

"My dear Charlotta, please look what you are doing. You have just arranged three glasses as close together as they can possibly stand and there are none at all on the other side of the table. I knew you would not be able to help Peggy and me. Why not go into the garden where we'll join you later? You need a good deal of added training before you are a success as a housemaid. I presume you never did anything of this kind before in your life."

"There you are mistaken, Bianca!" exclaimed the young Countess Charlotta Scherin. The trouble with me is that I was thinking of something else. Much as I hated and detested domestic labors, you know I have often told you that I was brought up in a German fashion upon our estate in Luxemburg, which means that a due attempt was made to turn me into a proper housewife. If I am a failure the fault is mine. You see, I never tried to learn properly before. Now since Mrs. Clark tells me that I cannot remain except

for a short time as a guest at 'The House of the Golden Wish' unless I can be useful, I intend to see that my services become valuable in more fashions than one. How strange to be here with you, Bianca, after our odd meeting in Luxemburg!"

The young girl, darting across the room, before Bianca was aware of her intention, had flung her arms about her and was embracing her with surprising ardor, considering the fact that they scarcely had been separated an hour for the past three or four days, even sleeping together at night.

The Countess Charlotta Scherin, who was introduced in the story known as "The Red Cross Girls With Pershing to Victory," possessed a cloud of soft dark hair, a vivid color and was altogether more Latin than Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic in her appearance and temperament. Her father, a German by birth, had been a German sympathizer during the war in spite of being a resident of the little Duchy of Luxemburg. However, Charlotta's mother had been a Frenchwoman, whose daughter

not only shared her characteristics but had kept her allegiances. Even at a time when Luxemburg was divided in her faith, the little Countess Scherin had been an ardent and outspoken advocate of the Allies.

The following moment Charlotta was busy with her domestic labors. From one spot to another she moved with a swiftness and ease which made her a fascinating figure.

"Do tell me how you happen to be here at 'The House of the Golden Wish,' Peggy. Peggy Harper is your name, isn't it? It is such a charming American name! Bianca has told me a little of your story, but she is such a ridiculously secretive person herself, never confiding what she thinks or feels. I am the opposite, I always ask what I wish to know. I suppose I am curious, but you must not mind because I am interested. Do sit down in that big chair and rest while Bianca and I finish the work. You do not look strong, and you surely are not old enough for a Red Cross girl."

The girl who had been addressed as Peggy

Harper, and had been allowed no opportunity to answer the original question in the flood of words following, shook her head and smiled.

"No, I am not a Red Cross nurse of course, although Mrs. Clark is kind enough to say I may give myself the title of helper. I am sure I don't mind telling you my history, which is a very simple one compared to yours. I don't know what would have become of me had I not been rescued by the Red Cross about two months ago when I was taken suddenly ill in an East Side tenement. Afterwards Dr. Clark and Mrs. Clark kept me in their home and cared for me. I know my being alone and without money must have looked strange, and it was a most unhappy experience. I came from my home in a little town in Tennessee with an old Scotch nurse who has been like a mother to my brother and me since our own mother died. We thought we brought enough money with us to wait in New York several months until my brother returned from overseas. And we did wait not several months as we had planned but

eight or nine. Then at the last Nanna was taken ill and died and the money was soon gone. You think it strange we had no friends in New York, yet it was true that we knew no one save the landlady in the lodging house, where we had lived waiting for Martin's home coming. He had written us when to expect him months before and we had sent our address. But when Nanna was no longer with me and Martin did not come and my money was vanishing I tried to find work. No one seemed to need me and so I went to the cheapest place to live I had ever heard of in all my life and among such strange people, some of them not even speaking English. Bianca says they were immigrants, but we know nothing of immigrants in our little village in Tennessee."

"But what an extraordinary story!" the Countess Charlotta exclaimed, pausing and holding a carving knife poised in the air. Surely you had friends and money at home. Why, I even considered myself an adventurous female in sailing for the United States with Susan Pringle to chaperon me

and plenty of money of my own, while you and your old Scotch nurse sound like a pair of pathetic babies."

The younger girl's face clouded.

"I have written home many times to the lawyer who has charge of my own and my brother's little estate and I cannot understand why he has never answered. Mrs. Clark is good enough to believe what I have told her and lately she too has written. Yet unless there is news I must soon go back home and try to find out what has happened. Only I do not wish to go because I keep hoping I may still hear from Martin. He must have returned home by now. Then why does he not try to find me? The other American soldiers all have returned."

"Find you? But, my dear child, how is your brother to guess where you are? Why, you are like a tiny speck in infinity and have been changing your residence as if you were an atom being blown by strong winds, the winds of circumstance."

"Don't discuss the subject any further, please, Charlotta," Bianca Zoli remarked in

a tone of mild reproach. "Peggy is not yet strong enough to endure a great deal of worry and you might have guessed that Dr. David and Sonya have applied to the war office to try to discover if Lieutenant Harper has come home to this country, or what the latest news of him may be."

There was a significant suggestion in Bianca's voice which seemed to satisfy Charlotta's curiosity for the moment at least. As a matter of fact Bianca was worn out with the effort to recount in the last few days all she knew of the life history of each member of their large and curiously assorted household to her visitor and friend, Charlotta Scherin. Accustomed to Charlotta's interest in the lives of the Red Cross girls she had met in Europe, she had not expected her curiosity to cover a so much larger field.

"Do come let us go outdoors, Charlotta, you and Peggy. Peggy, perhaps you and I may be allowed a brief rest while Charlotta interviews some one else. I am fond of you, Charlotta, as you know, and think you a beautiful and thrilling person. Yet I do

not consider that a Countess should be so curious, and sometimes you are most exhausting. Some of the soldiers are delighted to recount their histories, not that you seem to care a great deal whether your victim is a willing one."

Charlotta laughed.

"What a lecture, Bianca! I don't know what there is in my temperament that seems to influence people to lecture me. I am sure Peggy does not mind my questioning. Do you know, Peggy, you don't object to my calling you by your first name? I wish you would use mine as I detest 'Countess,' and besides it is too absurd to use a title in the United States! I have half an idea that if Dr. and Mrs. Clark fail to get in touch with your soldier brother I shall take it upon myself to find out what has become of him. You are such a dear, and look as if you had been taken care of every moment of your life. Moreover, I want an object in my own life. My beloved old maid chaperon, Susan Pringle, informs me of this every day. So why not let one of my objects be to discover your brother?

Oh, I know. The idea just occurred to me this instant, Bianca, so you need not appear surprised and unsympathetic. There must be a first instant for all ideas! Later if Peggy receives no news, Susan and I will go home with her to the little southern village and find out the mystery there."

Bianca gasped and then laughed.

Almost too quickly for her comprehension Charlotta thought and talked. What an extraordinary proposal she had just made! Nevertheless, under certain circumstances were there sufficient romance and adventure in the enterprise, Charlotta was capable of going through with it. She now saw, however, that Peggy Harper, whom she had helped to rescue two months before, was utterly bewildered by the young Countess and had not understood her impetuous suggestion save in the vaguest fashion.

Outdoors a few moments later, the three girls were walking arm in arm when Charlotta inquired in a changed tone,

"Bianca, is that Major James Hersey sitting under the trees in a wheeled chair? And is the Red Cross girl with him Nora

Jamison? I noticed they were talking together after dinner last night. Major Hersey and I were friends in Coblenz, but I don't think he likes me at present. He did not seem pleased to see me when I arrived at 'The House of the Golden Wish,' although I said and really meant I was delighted to meet him again. I believe he does not approve of my traveling about with Susan Pringle, but I could not stay in Luxemburg forever and I did so want to see the United States."

Charlotta made one of her abrupt pauses, her brilliant face suddenly serious.

"Bianca, do you think there is any way in which I too could manage to become a Red Cross nurse, an American Red Cross nurse?"

CHAPTER V

The Eternal Equation

SONYA CLARK considered her present household to embody more difficulties than any she so far had encountered. Nevertheless, it possessed this saving grace: seldom were any group of human beings gathered under one roof of so great interest and importance.

Under her roof she also hoped that a debt was being paid and lives remade. Peace meant something more here than the opportunity for political argument to these men who had come back from saving the world. Wounded and ill, they needed some return for all they had bestowed beside promises.

However, although Sonya was a devoted friend to every soldier in "The House of the Golden Wish," as had always been the case in the past, her important responsibilities lay among the Red Cross workers.

The organization of the home was under the direction of Dr. Clark and Captain Martin; Dr. Clark attending to the physical care of the men and Captain Martin superintending the vocational training.

Miss Blackstone, who had been chief nurse in a New York hospital, and later in a Red Cross hospital in France, had been persuaded by Dr. Clark to become a member of his latest household and so Sonya, relieved of this care, could give herself freely to the domestic interests of her varied family and to the creation of what she hoped represented a home to each one of them.

In a small house near the large one lived Nona and Captain Martin with half a dozen soldiers whose eyes had been injured during their service abroad. Captain Martin wished to devote special attention to them.

Above the large stables built many years before the rooms were given over to occupational work. Not only were several trades taught, but stenography and bookkeeping and a variety of studies. Several

of the instructors made their home in "The House of the Golden Wish," but the greater number came each day from Washington, devoted a few hours to the teaching and then returned to their families.

Sonya Clark considered that it was characteristic of her past to have burdened herself with the added responsibility of a young girl who had no especial place in "The House of the Golden Wish" at a time when she needed all her thought and energy for other purposes.

At this moment she was standing outside Peggy Harper's door feeling that she had unfairly neglected the child ever since her recovery from the illness from which Dr. Clark, Nora Jamison and Bianca Zoli had rescued her.

Yet within these weeks she herself had given up her New York City home and moved to the splendid old place near the National Capital. Here she had undertaken the inspiring task of assisting in the rehabilitation of the wounded American soldiers. With forty soldiers being cared for, small wonder that one young girl had suffered

from neglect! Nevertheless, Sonya regretted the necessity.

At present she expected to find Peggy alone, knowing that Nora Jamison, who shared the room with her, was caring for one of the soldiers who was ill. Bianca Zoli had driven into Washington for her French and music lessons. As it was so late in the season, Sonya had agreed that Bianca should not enter boarding school until the coming term.

As a matter of fact, Peggy had been left largely to Bianca's friendship and influence. Sonya was not even sure that she understood Peggy, who seemed nearly as reticent as Bianca had been and with far less practical sense.

As she knocked now on the door and Peggy opened it, she appeared so surprisingly childish for a girl of sixteen that Sonya repressed an exclamation of surprise. Peggy was wearing a faded, shrunken white dressing gown and had been lying down. She held a letter crumpled in her hand and must have been crying, as her face plainly revealed the fact.

"Are you homesick?" Sonya inquired, not very tactfully but because it was the first thought that occurred to her.

"No, Mrs. Clark, I cannot be homesick, since home means only a little white house with green shutters in a village street now empty and deserted. Indeed, I have heard so little news since I left home I am not even sure the house still belongs to my brother and me. It is all very mysterious and I have just decided that perhaps I had best not wait any longer for news of my brother, but go back home immediately. There is this difficulty: I shall have to ask some one to lend me the money to return. Afterwards, should I find that our own little estate is gone and my brother never returns, I will work and earn the money. You think perhaps I shall not be able to, and yet I have one accomplishment, one gift perhaps it should be called, that I have never spoken of. I don't know, perhaps I am a little ashamed of it, and yet were I forced to use it I think I could earn money with it."

Sonya frowned.

"I don't like mysteries, Peggy, particularly not among young girls. If you do not feel like confiding in me I wish you would make up your mind to speak freely to Bianca. You are a good deal alike in temperament and I am sure she will understand and try to help you. Has the letter you have just been reading anything to do with your present state of mind?"

Peggy Harper shook her head.

"No, not definitely, and yet I suppose it did affect me. My letter is from the young soldier whose family were so kind to me in my illness. They were kind to take me into their little crowded tenement. Several days ago I wrote to the son, Timothy Brackett, telling him of 'The House of the Golden Wish,' and he has just replied, saying that it sounds like a line of an Irish ballad, 'A Little Bit of Heaven.' You see, Timothy Brackett never has been well since his return from France and although he has tried two positions he has not been strong enough to hold either one of them. The father has been out of work and they are having a hard time to support so large a

family. You remember I went twice to see them after I recovered and it surprised me that the son was so superior, better educated than any member of his family. He seems most unhappy."

Peggy flushed and hesitated.

"Mrs. Clark, is it too much of a favor I desire to ask you? When I go away could you take Timothy Brackett into 'The House of the Golden Wish'? He seems not to know how to secure aid from the government and yet I am sure he would be given help if only some one understood his case. He told me that some day perhaps the United States intended to give the soldiers farms in the west. His great desire is to get away from the crowded East Side into the outdoors. He wants before that time to study scientific farming. But his letter to me is so discouraging. He says he is growing weaker each day instead of stronger, and that he won't be good for anything by the time help comes, if it ever does!"

Sonya shook her head.

"Yes, I suppose he is discouraged, and I am sorry. Dr. Clark met the young fellow

several times when he came to inquire for you and liked him. I wish 'The House of the Golden Wish' was large enough to hold all the soldiers in the country who would like to live here with us. Yet I am afraid we have scarcely room even for one more, and your leaving, Peggy, would make no difference; a soldier could scarcely take your place. However, if you desire to give me Timothy Brackett's letter I'll ask Dr. Clark to read it and see what can be done. He may be able to offer advice even if we cannot have the young man here.

"But, Peggy, I don't think you had better make up your mind to go back home at once, not for a week or more. It is of this I wish to speak to you. Charlotta asked me to tell you that she has gone to Washington to-day to see Colonel Churchill and to ask his aid in finding your brother. You know this is Colonel Churchill's house we are living in at present, 'The House of the Golden Wish.' Colonel Churchill has great wealth and influence in Washington and it was Charlotta's own idea to enlist his help for you. Charlotta has undertaken

what I am afraid I have neglected, Peggy; both Dr. Clark and I are sorry we have not been able to make more effort in your behalf. But I think you may trust the little Countess; Charlotta may be too impetuous, but she has more energy and enthusiasm than any one I can think of at this moment. So you had best stay with us for a while longer. If your brother is in this part of the world, Charlotta and Colonel Churchill are fairly sure to discover him. Try not to worry; you have had a tragic year, but things will be better."

Unexpectedly Peggy Harper's expression altered. Color came into her cheeks and a shining light into her blue eyes. Her fair hair, half silver, half gold, and worn short, was like an aureole.

"Yes," she returned, "I have just received the news that better fortune is coming to me very soon. I did not know whether to believe or not to believe. Now you have brought this word to me, I feel I had no right to have had so little faith. My brother will be restored to me, not exactly as he was before he sailed to France,

but if I am patient everything will come right in the end."

As she spoke Peggy Harper was not looking toward her companion, but staring at some invisible object straight ahead.

Was the child under the influence of an hallucination? Sonya asked herself. From whom had she received the information she claimed to have received? Personally she knew almost nothing of Peggy's character beyond her surface politeness and gentleness and but little of her history except its outlines. No human being seemed to have existed in her life of any importance save her brother and the old Scotch nurse whom she called Nanna. Both her mother and father had died when she was a tiny child.

"But from whom have you received news, Peggy, of the kind you have just mentioned to me? It might have been better to have told Charlotta. Perhaps you might have helped her in her quest."

Flushing slightly and recalling the presence of Sonya Clark, the young girl shook her head.

"No, I could be of no assistance, as I

know nothing definite," she answered. "And I have not received news in which I think you would believe. In a strange fashion the word came to me, Mrs. Clark. You don't believe, do you, that there are persons who now and then receive information not through the usual channels? Yet all my life since I was a very little girl this has happened to me. Sometimes years have passed and I have been aware of no such influences and then suddenly I seem to know of an event either in my own life or in some one's else before it takes place."

With a lack of sympathy, Sonya Clark bit her lip and frowned.

"Are you talking of messages from unseen sources? If that is what you meant by your hidden gift, then I am an unbeliever. Moreover, I think experimenting along those lines is bad for nearly every one except perhaps a scientist, and especially so for young girls. If you think you receive communications from the other world, I think it due to the lonely and self-centered existence you must have led. I presume your old Scotch nurse brought you up upon stories of witchcraft

and magic. When one goes back to the ancient folk lore the Irish and Scotch are not so unlike. If you wish to grow to normal and useful womanhood, leave such ideas alone, Peggy."

"I thought you would feel in this way, Mrs. Clark; most persons do, so I am sorry I mentioned it," Peggy returned courteously, but without making any promise or appearing impressed by the older woman's point of view.

And when Sonya had gone she went back to her small writing table and sat there alone with her pencil held inanimate for several moments above a sheet of paper. Then slowly letters began to form and a few lines of indistinct writing appeared.

After reading and re-reading the lines half a dozen times Peggy hid them away among other papers of the same character in the bureau drawer reserved for her few personal effects.

CHAPTER VI

A Misunderstanding

TOWARD the close of the same day Charlotta Scherin, accompanied by her English chaperon, Susan Pringle, returned from her visit to Colonel Churchill in Washington.

It was approaching dusk when she walked up the long avenue which led to "The House of the Golden Wish." Susan Pringle appeared exhausted from her day of sightseeing in the National Capital, but the little Countess was apparently possessed of the same energy with which she had set out early in the day.

Resting in his chair under a big tree near the house and loath to go indoors, Major Jimmie Hersey watched her with an expression it was not altogether easy to understand. Certainly it would have been difficult not to have felt some admiration, the young girl was so vivid, so keenly alive.

She was wearing a black hat and a black dress of some soft, light material and over it a purple coat which was partly open. Whether by accident or intention, the combination of colors made her hair and eyes appear duskier, her skin more clear and brilliant.

"Why, Major Hersey, what are you doing out here alone? Isn't it time an invalid was indoors?" she demanded, stopping in front of the young officer's wheeled chair.

Then she nodded to Miss Pringle.

"Go indoors, Susan, I know you are tired and I wish to talk to Major Hersey."

Then, as Miss Pringle hesitated,

"Dear me, Susan, it is perfectly proper. I won't be more than ten or fifteen minutes and all the household may join us if they like. You know, Major Hersey, I believe people wear themselves out thinking whether things may or may not be improprieties, perfectly simple, everyday things. I never intend to allow them to trouble me."

"No," Major Hersey returned, smiling in spite of his disapproval, "I don't believe you will, and I think I recall your having made

a remark of the same character when we met in Europe. I wonder if you will allow me to say something to you? I know you have an idea that because American girls are allowed a good deal of freedom we are an unconventional people. But you are mistaken. In many ways we are conventional, but remember you are a stranger and apt to be of more interest to people than you imagine. You will be watched and unless you are—well, reasonably careful, you may be talked about perhaps not altogether kindly."

Charlotta laughed.

"Yes, I remember you *felt* like this when we knew each other before, and I thought it extremely amusing. But why imagine I am going to do anything indiscreet simply because I like being straightforward and saying and doing what I think, rather than hiding my thoughts and desires as so many persons do?"

The young officer flushed.

"I am sorry if I have been officious; but we were friends, or at least I hoped we were, when we knew each other in Coblenz."

The little Countess took off her hat and began swinging it idly back and forth.

"Yes, that is just what I wish to talk to you about, Major Hersey, and why I sent Susan Pringle indoors so she would not be worried. If we *were* friends in Coblenz, why are we friends no longer? Now please don't speak until I have finished. You have been perfectly polite to me since I arrived at 'The House of the Golden Wish' several days ago. But you were *not* glad to see me. I did not try to hide how surprised and delighted I was to discover you living here, although I *am* sorry you are ill. I suppose this is the way in which I make the mistakes of which you and other people disapprove. I should not have pretended to be pleased.

"Of course I appreciate that you like Nora Jamison better now than you like me, although you used to prefer me when we first knew one another. However, I have always read in books and Susan Pringle has told me that men's affections are forever changing and one must never rely upon them for any length of time. Susan says this is a pity, but men really can't be

blamed, as they cannot help themselves. Susan had a lover once, or she thinks she had him, and he threw her over and married some one else. Now she says she hopes she has forgiven him. However, this has not anything to do with what I began to say. Why, even if you do prefer Nora Jamison, and I know she is odd and clever, do you not like me any more at all? This is the first chance I have had to talk to you alone, and I only had this opportunity because I insisted upon it, not because you wished."

Against his better judgment Major Jimmie Hersey laughed and leaned over and took the little Countess's hand, holding it for an instant and then dropping it.

"But you misunderstand," he attempted to explain. "I am glad to see you again, more so than I care to say. I told you in Coblenz that it might be wiser and happier for me, however, if our acquaintance ended there. But of course we are friends. Does not friendship mean one wishes the other human being every happiness and success? I am sure I wish happiness and success for you."

Charlotta sighed.

"That is not exactly my idea of friendship. I am sure I wish everybody to be happy whether they are my friends or not. But perhaps you are right. Now I want to take you into my confidence and to ask you to do me a favor. Do you know I have been in Washington all day trying to find out what has become of Peggy Harper's brother? If he is alive he must have returned from the war months before, and yet never a word of him has she heard. I went directly to call upon Colonel Henry Churchill, who owns this wonderful house. I told him who I was and that I had come on a visit to the United States because it seemed to me the most wonderful country in the world, but that I also wanted to be useful to some one if I could. And as everybody else here seemed too busy with Red Cross work I was going to try to find Martin Harper.

"Colonel Churchill was so kind, and I have been driving about Washington with him all day. We went to the War Department and the two big Government hospitals,

but so far we have learned nothing. Still, Colonel Churchill says he is convinced he can find out something in time and is pleased that I had brought the matter to his attention. He naturally feels a great interest in the members of his adopted family, or if not exactly his adopted family, at least in the people living for the present in his old family home.

"I told him as much as I could about Peggy and said she was very pretty and I thought belonged to an old Southern family, as Colonel Churchill himself does. Mrs. Clark told me this only last night, but I thought it might be well to talk as if I knew about old Southern families myself. It looks as if I really did understand something of the history of the United States. In any case, Colonel Churchill seemed interested and said he would be particularly pleased to help a fellow Southerner. You don't think this indiscreet, do you?"

Jimmie Hersey, who had been watching the young Countess Charlotta with every sign of attention, although not precisely hearing every word she said, now gave a little start.

"No, I think it was kind of you, and I am not surprised you were able to interest Colonel Churchill. But what was the favor you wished to ask me? I want to be able to promise to agree to it before any one comes to interrupt us, and I think Miss Jamison may appear at any moment. Dr. Clark's orders are that I am not to remain out of doors after the sun goes down."

"What is the trouble with you?" Charlotta inquired with a little frown. When her companion did not reply she went on:

"Oh, you wish to hear the favor? Why, it is only that I want to know if you will drive with me to-morrow? Please don't look uncomfortable, I do not mean drive with me alone. Colonel Churchill has offered to send a big carriage and a pair of horses and I am to drive about Washington to-morrow with him and see everything it is possible to see in one day. I am to be allowed to invite six other persons to go with us and I want you and Bianca Zoli, but so far I have not decided upon the others."

"You are kind," Jimmie Hersey answered,

"but there are other members of our present household who deserve the pleasure more than I do. I have not seen Washington in a long time, except that I was driven from the hospital here to the wonderful 'House of the Golden Wish.' Once I knew Washington very well and am a sufficiently good American still to think it the most beautiful capital in the world, even after I have seen several of the European capitals."

"But I am not asking that you go with us because you deserve the attention," Charlotta replied. "As a matter of fact, I don't think you do deserve to be asked; you have been so unfriendly. I am asking you because I thought I should enjoy having you. But if you would rather not——"

The little Countess was turning to go away when Major Jimmie, intending to call, found himself shouting in a louder tone of voice than he had intended.

"But I would enjoy it immensely and if Dr. Clark is willing and you really want me, I accept with pleasure. Will you send some one to help me indoors? It is such a bore having to sit still in this absurd fashion.

Now and then I think I'll give up and let anything happen to me that fate pleases. Better anything than being a hopeless burden!"

Charlotta turned.

"I presume I may be allowed to assist you? After all, if I am not a graduate Red Cross nurse I am as capable of pushing a wheeled chair as Nora Jamison. And please don't become discouraged about yourself. It must mean so much to many people to have you well again."

"It means nothing to anyone in this world, except perhaps my sister, and not a great deal to her."

"But you told me how greatly you wished to serve your country and that you had no idea of leaving the army as so many American soldiers are doing. Surely your country still needs you."

Jimmie Hersey smiled.

"Yes, but one wants a more personal interest when one is ill. Forgive me for growling, you have been awfully patient to listen."

The little Countess was pushing the chair

in front of her in such a fashion that it bumped more than might have been desirable for an invalid; however, she was unconscious of the fact and the patient seemed not to object.

"Oh, I rather like having you growl before me, as it shows we are friends again. Susan Pringle says men only reveal the faults in their dispositions when they think they know you well."

CHAPTER VII

Sight-Seeing in the National Capital

"THE city of Washington used to be called 'the Wilderness,'" Colonel Churchill remarked. "Oh, of course this was in the early days when the seat of government was about to be removed from Philadelphia to the new Capital and no one wished to leave the old Quaker city. But as a matter of fact, the town was so scattered and there were so few impressive buildings beside the Capitol and the President's residence that we must not blame our forefathers. In those days the National Capital as it now appears was a dream of a few far-sighted men; now to my mind it is a beautiful reality. However, my guests are not to let me bore them. As soon as you wish me to stop acting as your professional guide, suppose some one mentions the fact. Washington city is one of my greatest enthusiasms."

The little Countess laughed.

"Oh, I am not weary *yet*, Colonel Churchill, although I cannot promise to remember more than a small per cent of what you tell us. Please understand that I am really seeing Washington for the first time and that as I am a foreigner I shall carry to-day's impression with me always. But I am only speaking for myself. Perhaps the others are more familiar with Washington, and if this is true you may impart your information to me in so low a tone that no one else may hear."

"Charlotta Scherin," Bianca Zoli exclaimed reproachfully, "I should not have expected you to make an effort to secure Colonel Churchill's entire attention. Colonel Churchill, we are all equally interested. I am sure no one of us driving with you to-day is familiar with Washington, unless perhaps Major Hersey or Sergeant Morris. Nora Jamison is from California, Peggy Harper from Tennessee, and I have lived in New York City when I have been in the United States."

Colonel Churchill turned around from

the front seat where he was driving a magnificent pair of bay horses to say:

"Sergeant Morris, did I not hear you say that your name was Robert Morris? Are you a relative of the Robert Morris who helped finance the American Revolution and whose money built a great part of the early city of Washington?"

The young soldier to whom he had spoken hesitated an instant.

"Yes, I am a descendant of the great Robert Morris; we have never lost the name in our branch of the family. Yet this does not amount to much, does it, when one is a lame and penniless soldier?" he answered finally.

The bitterness of tone was so apparent that a little hush descended upon the group of people. They had just entered the city of Washington and were driving toward the Capitol, not in an automobile but in a splendid open carriage such as one rarely sees these days. The owner of the equipage and the host of the little party of sight-seers, Colonel Churchill, was past middle age, a type of Southerner who looked as if

he had belonged to a former generation. He had white hair, a Roman nose, bright blue eyes and a freshly colored complexion. Over six feet tall, he had a military bearing and while possessed of charming manners and great kindliness and generosity, a student of human nature would have grasped the fact that he was inclined to be dictatorial and under certain circumstances might reveal a violent temper.

Seated on either side of him were the Countess Charlotta Scherin and Peggy Harper, just behind them Bianca Zoli and Sergeant Morris and in the rear of the carriage Nora Jamison and Major Hersey.

"It is a great thing to be an American soldier, even if one is lame and penniless as you say that you are, sir, and also to be a descendant of a famous and disinterested American citizen," Colonel Churchill replied testily. "Besides, you are not penniless; if you have served your country faithfully it is her honor and pride to repay the obligation."

The silence became more uncomfortable.

The young soldier whose name was

Robert Morris flushed and frowned. He had brown hair and brown eyes, and strongly marked features made more conspicuous by the evidences of a long illness.

"I am sure you feel as you say you do, Colonel Churchill, and certainly those of us who are living at 'The House of the Golden Wish' can feel only gratitude to you. Yet there are a good many of us who do not wish to accept pensions from the government; we simply want a chance to make our own way again. Perhaps you cannot imagine what it means to be twenty-two years old and to have no future to look forward to except being a care upon some one else. I was planning to be a distinguished engineer and now—well, until I came to 'The House of the Golden Wish' I had given up pretty much all the ambition I ever had. Now I am hoping to learn to be a fair bookkeeper. But it is pretty discouraging to think of the other fellows who have been disabled by the war, and who are still waiting for the government to help them."

Colonel Churchill nodded. "The gov-

ernment has not moved as swiftly as we had hoped in its reconstruction work, but things will be straightened out in time and a lot of red tape and mismanagement dispensed with. Personally I am living in Washington and working every day of my life to try to achieve this end. Among this country's faults no man can say is a lack of generosity. And, young man, if you wished to be an engineer before you were an American soldier, then why study bookkeeping? I have known a number of distinguished engineers in my day and they were engineers with their brains, not with their legs. Remember, one can hire men with legs a good deal more easily than one can hire brains. I want you to take back a piece of advice from me to the soldiers who at present are living under my roof. They need not feel gratitude to me; my gratitude is to them, or else my house might be sheltering the Hohenzollerns instead of American boys, and the girls who are there to cheer and wait upon them. Tell them that *whatever* work they looked forward to undertaking before the war, *that* is the work they

must go on with if it is humanly possible. At times, of course, it is not possible; but it is amazing how many physical drawbacks a strong will can surmount. However, I am not here to preach but to show you the city of Washington."

The Colonel's little harangue closed with a slight huskiness of voice. "Boys, don't let yourselves become hardened or discouraged by a feeling of injustice. We believed in this country that you would win our battles for us when we sent you as nearly untrained an army as ever encountered a stupendous foe. Now you trust us."

"Hear, hear, Colonel Churchill!" Major Jimmie Hersey exclaimed. "I wish you would make that speech to a larger audience of American soldiers than you have with you at the present time. I am going to ask Dr. Clark to persuade you to talk to us in the same fashion at 'The House of the Golden Wish,' although we are not in need of encouragement to the same extent there as in other places. We would be a pretty poor lot if we were."

Then as Colonel Churchill started his

horses at a more rapid gait to cover his own embarrassment over having spoken at more length and with greater earnestness than he had intended, Major Hersey turned to Nora Jamison.

"I wonder if the old Colonel is right, Miss Jamison, and we should stick to our old dreams and ambitions as long as we can, even when the war seems to have knocked them out pretty completely. Take me, for example, a fellow likes best to talk about himself. Here I am still wanting to follow a military career and instead am condemned not to move unless I am forced into action. Poor tactics for a soldier! Shall I give up and learn to crochet or play chess as a steady job, or shall I keep on hoping?"

For an instant Nora Jamison did not reply. They were now driving along Pennsylvania Avenue, the central boulevard from the Monument to the Capitol. A hundred feet above the street rose the hill with the dome of the Capitol four hundred feet higher.

On this afternoon in May Washington

city was at its loveliest. The lawns were a brilliant green, the trees spreading canopies of shade flecked with sunlight, and the flowers a mass of fragrance and bloom.

Driving along Pennsylvania Avenue were many other carriages, some of them filled with members of Congress and the Senate and their families, others with diplomats and visitors from other countries.

"Why, yes, if I were you, Major Hersey, I would keep on hoping," Nora Jamison answered at last. "Dr. Clark thinks if you will only avoid excitement and worry and follow the treatment he has prescribed for you, you have a good chance to recover. Yet I did not reply to you at once because I was thinking of something. If you cannot continue to be a soldier, I think I would try to adopt a more useful profession than crocheting or chess, or at least one more suited to your tastes."

The girl was smiling so that her gray-green eyes were half closed, revealing only a slanting light; her lips were parted, her pallor unaltered by the wind and light.

"Why not become a *student of war* if you

cannot be a practical soldier? You could work several hours each day if you wished studying military tactics and perhaps later on write down your impressions. You won't think I am trying to dictate or even offer advice. But I have been worrying about you lately; you seem less content, more restless and dissatisfied than when you first came to 'The House of the Golden Wish' and we had our talk together in the garden. I have been wondering why. Perhaps it is because you need some occupation that must not tire you and yet may keep your thoughts from what is making you unhappy.

"I am speaking of this because I have found such a lot of help through my own Red Cross work. I suppose giving up one's desire is the hardest battle in the world. Yet I had to give up mine when the man to whom I was engaged was killed at Château-Thierry."

"Miss Jamison, you are a trump," Major Jimmie replied. "Besides, since I saw you that afternoon in the garden induce the birds to eat from your hand, I have known

you possessed a sympathy and understanding lacking in most of us. You are right, I have been more troubled of late than I was soon after my arrival at 'The House of the Golden Wish.' How beautiful the name is! A foolish desire in which I never really believed and thought was gone forever has recently been obtruding itself, another desire, not my personal ambition. However, it shall go the way of all foolish desires and I shall follow your suggestion and try to turn myself into a student."

The round boyish countenance of Jimmie Hersey lengthened. He had hated books even in his West Point days and forced himself to study only because of his love for an active military life demanded that he obtain a certain average in his class work.

"You'll help me, won't you?"

Nora Jamison nodded, having just entered the grounds surrounding the White House; the beauty and simplicity of the old house and its surroundings completely fascinated her.

CHAPTER VIII

Messages

ONE afternoon several days after the drive in Washington, Charlotta Scherin slipped quietly into the room occupied by Nora Jamison and Peggy Harper. In her hand she held a small package and wore an air of mystery.

"Do come into Bianca's and my room, Peggy, I think we will be safer there. Susan Pringle is deeply occupied with darning and mending and if Bianca appears we can pledge her to secrecy. I think I would rather have any one know than Miss Jamison. She might betray us to Mrs. Clark."

"Very well," the younger girl agreed, "but I do not understand why you do not like Nora Jamison. She is odd, yet she is extremely kind, and a wonderful Red Cross nurse!"

"Well, she has not been kind to me of

late, although perhaps she does not know it. And I confess I am prejudiced against her without the fault being precisely hers. But do come along while there is time."

Slipping her arm through Peggy's and entering the adjoining room, Charlotta carefully closed the door behind her. Then she hesitated an instant.

"Do you think it would be all right if I locked the door? I should not like to be discovered, and if any one knocks we can hide things away before the door is opened."

Peggy Harper frowned.

"Countess Charlotta, you behave as if we were planning to do something wicked and I don't like it. Of course people are critical and unsympathetic, but the thing is not wrong in my opinion or I would not take part in it."

"No, you would not, Peggy, but perhaps *I would*, if it were not so *very* wrong. You see, I suppose one of my ruling traits of character is curiosity, since most of my friends say so. I know I do try to find out as much as I can from living people. Now if there really is a chance to find out things

from other sources, well, I don't think I should try hard to resist the impulse. But of course it is not wrong; the whole world is interested in the same subject."

"Nevertheless, Countess Charlotta, you must be serious, or else I can do nothing."

"Oh, I shall be serious enough, Peggy, more so than you dream, if youwill only kindly stop calling me 'Countess.' Charlotta is a sufficiently long name without my tiresome title. I shall call you Princess Peggy if you don't do as I ask."

Peggy smiled.

"Well, who knows, perhaps I would like it? Now show me what you bought in Washington and tell me how you managed to secure it. Was Miss Pringle with you at the time?"

Charlotta shook her head in her usual emphatic fashion.

"No, Susan would have spoiled everything. She is a dear and too kind to me for words, yet she is an extremely conventional person and very narrow in her views. Poor dear, that is why my father finally agreed to allow me to travel in the United States

with Susan as my chaperon. He knew she would do all she could to prevent my getting into difficulties, and no one could do more. But about my purchase; I did have the most dreadful time getting rid of Susan even for the short time that was necessary. I finally enticed the poor dear into buying some hideous warm things for me and when she was deeply interested I walked over to another counter in the shop and then slipped away and made a special purchase for myself. Look what I bought!"

While the two girls were talking, Charlotta was carefully unwrapping her small package, which proved to be a small triangular shaped piece of wood on three short legs.

"Behold the famous, much admired and much maligned Ouija board!" Charlotta announced in a tone of amusement, awe, and triumph. "This one has a pencil attachment and writes its own messages."

In a wholly reverent spirit Peggy picked up the small object.

"Do you know, Charlotta, I have never seen a Ouija board before, although I have

been what my old Scotch nurse, Nanna, called 'eerie' ever since I was a little girl. My mother died when I was a baby and I have always had a strange impression that when I was about five or six years old I saw her. I remember Nanna, my brother Martin and I had gone up into the Tennessee mountains to spend the summer at one of our own farms. I was sitting in Nanna's lap in the open doorway being undressed for bed, just after twilight. I recall that it was not yet dark. I don't think Nanna and I had been talking of my mother or that I was thinking of her, but all at once I became conscious of a tall lovely figure, not white, but of misty gray, who with outstretched arms was leaning over me. I called out 'Mother!' Nanna thought I had fallen asleep and was dreaming and put me to bed. The presence was never returned, although I have done my best sometimes to persuade it to return."

"But when did you find out you could do the mysterious writing, Peggy dear, in handwritings that were unlike your own?" Charlotta inquired. "I wonder if I am

really such a material person that I have never had such experiences?"

The two girls had seated themselves close beside a small table with a large sheet of writing paper before them.

"I don't believe you are as material as you think you are, Charlotta; suppose you put your hand on the Ouija with mine."

Charlotta shook her head.

"No, Peggy, not at first, please. I want to ask a question and I don't wish even you to know what it is. I want to find out if Ouija can answer a question asked in my mind rather than by my lips."

"It will be more difficult, Charlotta, but we can make the attempt if you like. Please think constantly of what you wish to know and don't allow your thoughts to wander."

"There is not much danger of that, my dear, as I have been thinking of nothing else for days."

Then the two heads drew close together, the fair one of the younger girl and Charlotta Scherin's dark one.

Several moments passing with nothing taking place and Peggy's hand remaining

immovable on the Ouija board, Charlotta made a slightly impatient movement.

"I told you nothing would happen if you were impatient, Charlotta," Peggy murmured. "Please concentrate as much as possible."

Again stillness and silence; the older of the two girls frowning with the intensity of her effort to command a reply to her unasked question, Peggy looking into space, her face serene.

Then unexpectedly under Peggy Harper's light touch the small triangular board with its upright pencil began to move slowly, at first with jerks and starts. Charlotta, who was watching intently the white surface of paper underneath, could see nothing except long, irregular scrawling lines without semblance of letters.

Never glancing toward her own hand, Peggy Harper made no effort to discover what was taking place.

The following instant, however, the pencil moved more sedately and Charlotta could see letters forming, then words, then sentences. At present she was unable to read them.

Finally with a little jerk the Ouija board slid from the paper, the pencil slipping from Peggy's stiffened fingers.

The two heads bent closer now to the white sheet of paper with its queer scrawling inscriptions.

"You are sure you remember your question, Charlotta?"

Charlotta nodded, much more excited and mystified than her companion.

"I cannot make a particle of sense out of what I am able to read," she remarked an instant later in a disappointed tone. "What does it mean to you?"

Peggy leaned her head on her hand:

"Bee," she spelled out slowly. "Do not worry over me. Sorry. No more. Mother."

Does this answer your question, Charlotta?"

The other girl shook her head.

"Most certainly it does *not*, Peggy. Not the wildest stretch of the imagination could find any connection between my question and such an answer. But at least I read the words as you do, so we cannot both be mistaken."

"Don't be disappointed, Charlotta; sometimes other questions are answered instead of the one asked, and then by and by one has better luck. Suppose I try again."

However this time the Ouija board grew more unruly, twisting and turning until the only letters that were discernible were the three—"B-e-e."

"I do not understand," Peggy protested, "whether the Ouija is trying to spell 'Be' and spells it incorrectly, or talking about a Bee. But this last idea seems so foolish. Still I should have warned you, Charlotta, that as often as not the thing people call 'automatic writing' does seem incomprehensible. Shall we stop trying and make the attempt some other day when we may have better luck?"

But before Charlotta made a reply both girls started. A hand was turning the knob of the door and finding it locked, had begun knocking.

"Charlotta, it is I, Bianca. Why is the door locked? Is there any reason you do not wish me to come in? If there is, don't trouble and I'll come back later."

A moment the two girls inside the little room glanced at each other, embarrassed and uncertain.

"Bianca will be hurt if we don't explain and keep her outside," Charlotta whispered. "What must we do, hide the Ouija? She will probably think we are wicked or absurd."

"Do just as you like, Charlotta, but please understand I do *not* believe we are either of the things you suggest, no matter what Bianca's or any one else's opinion may be."

Hearing the whispering going on from outside the hall, Bianca Zoli spoke again, and assuredly the tone of her voice had changed, so that she sounded both angry and hurt.

"Oh, don't trouble please, Charlotta, about opening the door. I am going away at once. Later, when you are willing to allow me in our room, will you please let me know?"

And Bianca was actually moving away when the door was flung abruptly open and in her usual impetuous fashion Charlotta's arms were flung around her.

"Oh, don't be annoyed, Bee dear, come in please. Peggy and I have been doing something of which we are afraid you will not approve. We are pretty sure Mrs. Clark does not. But I would rather you would know than have you hurt with me. See, Peggy and I have been trying to write with the Ouija board, but I cannot say we have had much success. You have heard of the Ouija, haven't you? I confess I never had until I came to the United States. But then we are so shut out from the exciting things in Luxemburg."

Without any choice of her own, as Charlotta was at once stronger and at the present moment more determined, Bianca found herself drawn into her bed-room, the door once more closed and locked.

"Peggy is psychic. Is that what you call your gift, Peggy?" Charlotta demanded. "But why do you look so queer? Are you ill?"

Peggy laughed.

"No, not in the least. Only I was startled by the name you called Bianca a moment ago."

"But, Peggy, *there is something the matter.* What did I call her? I do not remember."

"Oh, nothing, except that you said, Bee dear, and I have heard Bianca called Bee by other persons."

"There is nothing so remarkable in that fact, is there, Peggy? I scarcely remember a time when some one has not shortened my name in this fashion."

Bianca moved over toward the table, glancing down at the paraphernalia, the little board and the loose sheets of paper.

"You were disagreeable, making secret scientific or psychic experiments, whichever you prefer, and leaving *me* out in the cold. Of course I am interested, although I cannot say I am a believer in such psychic phenomena as I have ever known," Bianca commented in a half amused and half serious tone. "However, I think it may be just as well not to obtrude the Ouija experiments upon Sonya. I happen to know that she and Dr. Clark are scornful of what they call the wave of superstition that is engulfing so many people since the war. It is a natural result, they consider, of the loss of

so many lives during the war. But personally I can't help wishing to know if there is anything in it."

"I suppose most persons feel in the selfsame way," Peggy Harper returned.

Idly Bianca picked up the sheet of paper upon which the few words were written in a fairly legible handwriting and endeavored to decipher them. Peggy Harper stood studying her expression with intent interest, while Charlotta Scherin moved over toward the window and glanced out at the group of soldiers on the lawn.

An exclamation from Bianca made her turn swiftly around.

"Bianca, what is it?" she demanded. "You look as if you had seen a ghost. Perhaps the Ouija experiments are not wise; at least it seems to make one nervous. But something has happened which has frightened or upset you, Bee. Tell me what it is at once."

"There is nothing to tell," Bianca returned, and then her eyes dropped before her friend's questioning ones.

"I *am* sorry for you, Bianca," Charlotta

said quietly, "because it is so difficult for you to take any human being into your confidence. I sometimes think it wiser to be frank as I am rather than reserved as you are. But never mind, neither Peggy nor I wish to hear what you do not care to have us know. However, do not attempt to pretend that some change has not come over you in the past few moments. If you will kindly glance at yourself in the mirror I think you will appreciate the reason I have this impression."

"Don't be angry, Charlotta. If you and Peggy will sit down for a few minutes I will tell you something, and it may explain to you why I appear more secretive than most girls. You know, don't you, that although my father was an American, my mother was an Italian. I have allowed you to believe she was an Italian of good birth, but when I have talked of my mother, I have really meant my foster mother, who was *not* my own mother. She was an Italian peasant woman, and although she scarcely allowed me to claim her as mother was devoted to me in a strange way and I

was very selfish and not kind to her. Well, when the war came, in order to obtain money for me she betrayed certain war secrets and afterwards completely disappeared. I have never heard one line concerning her since then. Now I have just read upon this paper a strange sentence that might come from her, and yet may have no meaning at all. So I think you will understand why I am at least a little excited and confused."

Charlotta put an arm about her friend.

"Bianca, forgive me, I did not mean you to tell more of your history than you wished, only it makes you more wonderful to me than ever. You seem to me the most aristocratic person I have ever known. In spite of my title I am not in the least aristocratic, and don't even wish to be. I am interested in everybody, rich and poor alike. But you have an aloof air and you only care for a very few persons and for them very deeply. I would not worry about this if I were you; after all, it is so uncertain. Yet perhaps you had best speak to Mrs. Clark. Even if she does disapprove of

Peggy and me in consequence, you might be happier. And as I bought the Ouija I'll take the responsibility. I am afraid Mrs. Clark does not altogether approve of me in any case."

"Well, you are not to have this added to your list of wrong-doings," Bianca answered. "Unless the Ouija gives us information much more to the point than this, we might as well keep the news to ourselves. If you don't mind my joining you, suppose we make another attempt some other afternoon, and let us go to the little house by the river where we will be without danger of interruption. Later on perhaps we may decide to confess. But even if it is not praiseworthy I confess my curiosity *is* aroused by the message which seems to be addressed to me. I do not wish to be discouraged from making another effort. Sonya won't mind really, only she will probably think it not wise for us and she will not wish the others to find out and discuss and perhaps make fun. At least the matter should be treated seriously, or in my opinion left alone."

"I entirely agree with you," Peggy Harper returned. "But so far as I am personally concerned, Mrs. Clark does know that I am interested in psychic matters I talked to her a little on the subject. Recently I have been feeling convinced that my brother would soon be found and reunited with me from a message I received from an unknown source. But of course I have had more practical reasons for my faith since Charlotta and Colonel Churchill have been devoting themselves to the search. I cannot imagine Charlotta not succeeding in what she sets out to do."

Charlotta Scherin, who was older than the other two girls, having passed her twenty-first birthday, gave a little mournful shake of her head.

"No one in this world has ever had their own way less often than I, or wanted it more. I thought when I managed to come to the United States that I was having my way in the thing which seemed most important at the time. But now when I want something else much more, what does it amount to? However, I am talking self-

ishly and intend to do my best for you, Peggy, until some news of your brother is unearthed. It cannot be possible we shall not find out something. Colonel Churchill is too influential a man in Washington. And by the way, Peggy, he seems to have taken the greatest fancy to you. On our drive the other day I thought he wanted to adopt you at once and make you his heiress, so that after every disabled soldier in the present war has found health and happiness under the shelter of 'The House of the Golden Wish,' you can live on here with the elderly colonel."

Peggy laughed. Charlotta's nonsense was refreshing after the past hour's nervous tension.

"Oh, of course, the Colonel and I understand each other, Charlotta, as he is a southerner and so am I. But I think he has adopted as many persons as one would care to undertake for the present, considering the fact that he is trying to play godfather to as many disabled American soldiers as can find lodging under his roof."

"Which reminds me," Bianca announced,

"that I came into this room, or rather I tried to come into this room, a little while ago, for a very definite reason. I wanted to tell you that we are to have a Red Cross concert to-night for our soldiers. Theodosia Thompson is to give a recitation and there will be people from the Capital and Sonya wishes us to dress and try to make the occasion as agreeable and cheerful as possible."

Charlotta hid away her latest treasure.

"Disappointing old thing, why did you not answer what I want so much to know?" she murmured. Then turning to her companions,

"I am glad we are going to have a party, I intend to wear the prettiest dress I own."

"Who is it you wish to impress, Charlotta?" Bianca queried.

But Charlotta made no reply.

CHAPTER IX

"Carry On"

THE two drawing-rooms with the folding doors open were hung with the Red Cross and Allied flags.

In order to command a better view of the room and to give the speakers a fairer chance to be heard, a temporary platform had been erected.

The two rooms were filled with flowers gathered from the old garden, lilacs and snowballs and bowls of lilies of the valley and wild violets. From forty to fifty soldiers were living in the "House of the Golden Wish," half as many Red Cross workers and a few vocational teachers. A number of guests had also been invited from Washington, as the National Capital was only a short distance away.

At eight o'clock the drawing-rooms were filled with visitors, some of them friends and relatives of the members of the household,

and others who were to take part in the entertainment. There were also several guests holding important political positions in the National Capital, who were especially interested in the American Red Cross Home Service for the wounded.

"The House of the Golden Wish" was so unique in its character and effort, as to excite the curiosity of nearly every human being who heard of it. And to-night it was revealed as rarely charming, a big, generous and beautiful home before it was anything else.

Colonel Churchill, the owner of the house, was present as one of its guests, but an especially honored one. He was to speak during the program.

Several weeks before when Theodosia Thompson, who had been one of the Red Cross nurses in a hospital in France and later with the American Army of Occupation in Coblenz, had asked to be taken into Dr. Clark's and Sonya's new household, Sonya had agreed only upon condition that the experiment be regarded as a temporary one.

During the months in Europe Theodosia, who was a Kentucky girl, had not been altogether satisfactory as a Red Cross nurse. Frankly she had announced that nursing was not her métier and that as soon as the war was over she intended following another profession. And in a measure she had kept her word. During the months after her return, living alone in New York City upon the barest pittance, as she was almost without money, she had studied every hour of the day and night when it was possible. Notwithstanding the two arts which so interested her, dancing and recitation, Theodosia discovered that for the present at least she had no desire to go upon the stage. She too had not been able to lay aside her Red Cross work so readily as she had hoped and expected during the last weeks abroad when she had grown weary of her daily tasks.

In New York City, however, entirely by accident had she again been drawn into the Red Cross work. Meeting a friend whose brother was ill in the Brooklyn Naval Hospital, Theodosia had gone to visit him.

The sister begged that she make an effort to cheer the young fellow as much as possible, as his physicians had announced that he was physically on the road to recovery, if he could be relieved of his depression.

Never was Theodosia to forget the scene that met her eyes upon the afternoon of her first call. By chance she had not come in contact with any of the disabled men since her own home coming.

To-day the big, sunshiny room was filled with them. Some were talking, others reading, one was picking out a mournful tune upon the piano.

"I am afraid we are all in the dumps to-day," one of the nurses remarked to Theodosia. "I suppose it is the weather. Life seems to have been one blizzard after another this winter, does it not? If you have *any* accomplishment, do for goodness' sake see what you can do to enliven us."

A quarter of an hour after, to her own astonishment, Theodosia discovered herself the center of an amused and admiring circle. She had recited half a dozen humorous poems and instructed an equal number of

the men in a few of the simple dancing steps.

Moreover, Theodosia's devotion to her studies afterwards suffered a weekly interruption, as she spent one afternoon each week with the disabled sailors.

Thereafter, gradually the conviction grew upon her that her duty for the present was to devote herself and her small accomplishments to the entertainment of the men who had come home never to fight again. In the beginning she had struggled against the idea. Had she not done her full duty by serving the Red Cross in Europe? Now it had become necessary that she train herself for a profession for which she was better fitted than nursing, and one in which she could earn her living.

Night after night, returning to her tiny lodging, Theodosia argued the problem with herself. Then a letter arrived from Bianca Zoli, written from "The House of the Golden Wish," and telling of the service Sonya, Dr. Clark and their household hoped to accomplish and her decision was taken. She would go down to Washington, see

Sonya Clark and discuss the problem with her.

As a matter of fact, during the early days of arranging and planning and settling the newcomers in their home, Sonya had not realized the very problem which Theodosia's unexpected appearance was to present. The soldiers, who would spend whatever length of time was necessary at "The House of the Golden Wish," would be on the road to recovery in many cases and in others must be prepared to accept their misfortunes and make the best of them. They would have as cheerful a home as could be provided, friends, and occupation. Sonya did not consider that the men would need further entertainment, not dreaming of the depression which was partly the result of semi-invalidism and partly the change from the terrible yet always stirring life of the soldier.

Therefore, half doubting Theodosia Thompson's devotion to the Red Cross service, and half doubting their own need of her, Sonya had suggested that Theodosia first try the experiment of a month's visit.

The experiment had now lasted two weeks, and not once but many times even in the short interval, Sonya had felt cause for gratitude. The members of her varied family were busy and apparently content during the day, yet there was scarcely an evening when Theodosia was not in demand. And Sonya, although too busy to give any individual Red Cross girl especial attention, felt she noticed a change. Theodosia's days were devoted to study, notwithstanding, a new spirit of unselfishness seemed to have taken possession of her, and the old restlessness and mischief making had at least temporarily subsided.

To-night the idea of the entertainment and of inviting distinguished guests from Washington had originated with Theodosia, although later on she had received advice and help.

Ordinarily wearing their Red Cross uniforms such as they had worn overseas, the Red Cross girls had been allowed to use their own judgment with regard to their costumes for the evening's entertainment.

Sonya herself set the example by choosing

a lavender crepe gown she had owned several seasons, nevertheless it was still one of her favorites. Theodosia always preferred wearing black, besides possessing only one evening gown. Bianca and Peggy were to be in white, and Nora Jamison until the last moment had not said whether she would wear her dress uniform or an evening costume. Several of the older Red Cross girls chose to wear their uniforms.

The one person declining to give any information regarding her toilet was the young Countess Charlotta Scherin, notwithstanding Bianca's repeated inquiries.

"But you must tell me what you mean to wear, Charlotta," Bianca urged not half an hour before the entertainment was to take place. "Please do not embarrass us by being too gorgeous and outshining every one else. Naturally this would be easy for you, but I don't think Sonya would like it, and I do hope you and Sonya will continue friends. You don't know what a pleasure it is to me to have you here with us. Personally I hope you may stay indefinitely."

Charlotta, who at the moment was kneel-

ing upon the floor tying a pale yellow ribbon sash about Peggy Harper's waist, glanced over toward Bianca with an expression and a manner unlike her usual frank one.

"Oh, thank you for wishing to have me remain with you, Bianca, but I am not sure it may be wise for me to stay too long, until Mrs. Clark and perhaps other people grow tired of me. Don't worry over my appearance. I shall not be startling. In any case I don't wish to come downstairs until later. At present I am interested only in the effort to make this sash hide the tuck Susan Pringle made in this dress of mine in order that it might fit Peggy. Peggy, you don't know what a darling you do look! I feel more convinced than ever that the colonel will lose his heart to you."

Peggy Harper flushed and then gave a sigh.

"You are one of the dearest people in the world, Charlotta. I wonder if you know I never had on such a charming dress in my life? I have never even owned a party dress except white muslins. It seems odd that I was not twelve years old

when my brother went to Europe. I told you he was in the French ambulance service before we entered the war. Later he became an American soldier. I suppose even if we do discover him finally we shall hardly know each other."

"Nonsense, no one could forget you, Peg o' my Heart!" Charlotta murmured. "Now, Bianca, you and Peggy go on downstairs. Mrs. Clark wishes you to help receive people, I'll appear later."

Half an hour after the lights in the large drawing rooms were dimmed so that the lighting of the little stage would be more conspicuous.

The rooms held an audience of more than a hundred persons. Seated upon the front row of chairs were Dr. and Mrs. Clark and Bianca, with Peggy Harper close beside Colonel Churchill and several other of the more prominent of the visitors from the National Capital.

As a matter of fact, one of the Assistant Secretaries of War had accompanied Colonel Churchill and several members of the Federal Board for Vocational Training.

"Don't you think some of our guests are apt to be bored by an amateur entertainment?" Bianca whispered in an aside to Sonya.

The older woman shook her head.

"Our guests have come not because of our entertainment but because of the interest they feel in what we are trying to accomplish.

"Besides, Bianca, our entertainment is not to be altogether an amateur one. I have a surprise in store for you and for every one, which is apt to make the evening worth while. But don't ask questions."

Bianca had no opportunity.

At present Theodosia Thompson was approaching the center of the little stage, where as a prelude to the entertainment she was to recite a short poem of Kipling's, which chanced to be a favorite with the American soldiers.

"Theodosia was one of the persons oddly transformed by an appearance upon a stage. With her red hair and large light blue eyes with their red brown lashes, her long nose and too pointed chin, she possessed few of

the ordinary attributes of beauty. Yet upon the stage the very irregularity of her features and the strangeness of her coloring became fascinating.

To-night the little poem with which she was to begin was so simple that she seemed to speak without effort or the least embarrassment, as if she were reciting for half a dozen of her soldier acquaintances. This she did many times within each twenty-four hours. In her hand she held a collection of small silk flags, the Stars and Stripes, the Tricolor, the Union Jack, the Italian and Belgian flags. And although making no reference to them, hearing the lines of her recitation the significance of the flags was plain enough to her audience.

"I have eaten your bread and salt,
I have drunk your water and wine;
The deaths ye died I have watched beside,
And the lives ye led were mine.

"Was there ought that I did not share
In vigil or toil or ease—
One joy or woe that I did not know,
Dear hearts across the seas?

"I have written the tale of your life
For a sheltered people's mirth,
In jesting guise—but ye are wise,
And ye know what the jest is worth."

Then because the poem held a tragic suggestion of things that were past, Theodosia rapidly changed into a southern dialect story for which she possessed a peculiar genius, the story of "Ole Stracted."

Her listeners were deeply interested. Only Bianca Zoli was disturbed by the absence of Charlotta and kept turning her head, wondering why Charlotta did not join them to occupy the seat which was being held for her on one side of Colonel Churchill.

Bianca did not feel altogether happy concerning her friend. Charlotta had changed since their meeting in Europe. She had gained the things she then had declared necessary to her happiness, as her father had agreed not to attempt to force her marriage with a German, his own friend, a man so much older and in every way unsuited to his daughter. Charlotta was free to travel in the United States and to form herself

upon the model of an American girl, which she had insisted was her desire. Nevertheless, Bianca did not feel that Charlotta was so happy or contented as might have been expected.

A moment later, however, in the midst of Theo's story telling, Bianca observed the little Countess slip quietly into the drawing-room, but instead of coming forward toward the front row of seats she took her place amid a group of soldiers. She was soon lost to view. Yet in a single moment Bianca appreciated that she need not have allowed herself to worry over her friend's costume. Charlotta had never worn a simpler dress or one more becoming. Bianca saw in a glance that it was pale gray and of some soft, filmy material but wholly without trimming. Above it her dusky hair rose darker and more full of shadows and her eyes appeared more radiant and her color more brilliant.

Then Theodosia Thompson's recitation closed and Colonel Churchill ascending the platform, Bianca felt called upon to pay closer attention.

Colonel Churchill announced that the subject of his talk was to be "Carry On," the phrase used so frequently during the war in Europe. It held an even deeper meaning to-day, not alone for the soldiers and the Red Cross, but for the nation and the world.

"The trouble with the politicians in this country and in Europe is that they have forgotten what we intended to 'Carry On'," he announced. "But I do not believe that the American soldiers or the American Red Cross have forgotten. Always I have been glad that my old home was near the National Capital, but never so glad as at present. Do you know why? It is because, in spite of the quarrels that must ensue in every government until we are far more perfect human beings, Washington City has been associated with so many of our great Americans. And our greatest Americans, beginning with George Washington, have been the men who have fought against handicaps, who have been strongest when life appeared hardest and success farthest away. I want you men whom the war has

disabled to remember this. I believe each one of you who fights through the handicap which his service to humanity has put upon him will come forth a stronger man, better fitted for a higher place in the world than if he had continued with the everyday existence he reasonably expected to live, had the war not disrupted the face of the earth. You have seen great sights, you have thrilled to a great cause, you have paid a great price. No man can do more. Now you are ill and suffering, yet you have not forgotten and will never forget. Mentally and spiritually and practically, I want every American soldier and sailor whom we say the war has disabled, if it is humanly possible, to be helped by his very disability. I want you who are living here at 'The House of the Golden Wish' to undertake courses of work and study that you might never have had the opportunity to undertake had things gone on in the ordinary course of events. Disabled soldiers? Why, you will become more able citizens from this fact, soldiers of peace such as we need in our national life."

Though he belonged to an old-fashioned school of oratory, Colonel Churchill was able to arouse and hold the interest of his audience.

Naturally his speech was chiefly addressed to the soldiers, yet Bianca found her own attention so engaged that she did not observe who it was that slipped into the place reserved for Charlotta until a voice spoke in her ear.

"Bianca, have you forgotten your friend?"

With a start of recognition, Bianca turned.

"Carlo Navara, I did not dream you were in this part of the world!"

"Then you fail to read the newspapers, Bianca mia, or you would have learned that the world famous tenor, Carlo Navara, was to make his appearance at a concert in Washington this afternoon."

"And you have come to sing for us at 'The House of the Golden Wish' to-night? Is that what Sonya meant when she said she had a surprise in store for her audience?"

"Why not? Sonya wished it and I

thought Bianca might be pleased. Do you remain my greatest friends?"

Bianca shook her head.

"No, Carlo, I have no such expectation now you are becoming a more famous person every day. Yet it will be wonderful to hear you sing once again. Now we must not talk any more. The Colonel's speech is nearly ended, so try not to be restless."

Carlo Navara smiled in the indulgent fashion with which he had regarded Bianca through their long friendship. Her understanding of his character was sometimes amusing. At present, for instance, Bianca intended to suggest the obvious fact that he would grow restless if any one except himself occupied the center of the stage.

A few moments later Sonya Clark was herself introducing the distinguished singer to the audience.

"Carlo Navara, whose name perhaps the greater number of you know, I met first in Italy. An American citizen, because of his Italian parents he gave up his career

as a singer in order to fight for world freedom under the Italian flag.

Wounded, he had returned to the United States when his own country entered the war. Then again he became a soldier, this time an American soldier in France serving under the Stars and Stripes. Now he is daily a more and more famous artist. He has just hurried to us from his début in Washington this afternoon and I am sure he is especially pleased at the opportunity to sing for his fellow soldiers."

Later Carlo sang with the old simplicity and sincerity characteristic of him as an artist if not as a man. First he sang several of the ballads which he remembered the soldiers had liked in the old days in camp. How far away they now seemed to him, whose life had been crowded with success since then. Not so far away perhaps to the men whose wounds had not yet healed! Then Carlo closed with a little poem of Stevenson's which had been set to music especially for him:

And to Sonya Clark he looked like the boy she had first met in Italy years ago.

"I woke before the morning, I was happy all the day,
I never said an ugly word, but smiled and stuck to play.

"And now at last the sun is going down behind the wood,
And I am happy, for I know that I've been good.

"My bed is waiting, cool and fresh, with linen smooth and fair,
And I must off to sleepsin-by, and not forget my prayer.

"I know that till to-morrow when I see the sun arise,
No ugly dream shall fright my mind, no ugly sight my eyes.

"But slumber hold me tightly till I waken in the dawn
And hear the thrushes singing in the lilacs round the lawn."

Carlo and Bianca, wandering about, conversing with the soldiers, came finally upon Charlotta Scherin. She was talking to Major Jimmie Hersey, whose hand was resting upon Nora Jamison's arm. He had risen in order to speak to Carlo Navara.

The change in the young officer whom he

had known in Coblenz shocked Carlo, although he made an effort to conceal the fact.

The two girls, Bianca and Charlotta, left them together.

"I never saw you looking lovelier than you do to-night," Bianca whispered. "Why did you not sit with us?"

"Why, Bianca? Only because I wanted to talk to Major Hersey and I hoped he would be pleased with my appearance. But he paid no attention to me except that he is always polite. Sometimes I wish he would forget to be now and then. I suppose there is no reason for me to try to hide it from you, Bianca, that I like Major Hersey and I am sorry he no longer likes me. You are younger than I, but I know you will understand and keep my confidence."

"Of course, my dear," Bianca murmured. "But, Charlotta, after all, why should you care? Surely you realize that you and Major Hersey never could be more than ordinary friends. He was a talented officer, I know, but now the war is over and his health has broken down,

he has no chance to be of importance in the world. You have wealth and beauty and position. Naturally Major Hersey must consider this if you do not."

Charlotta sighed.

"Dear me, and I thought the United States was a democratic country! Why else have I always dreamed of coming here? However, Bianca, I am afraid this is not the reason Major Hersey pays so little attention to me. You see, he intends to get well and continue his profession as a soldier and Nora Jamison has promised to help him. Suppose we go and speak to Colonel Churchill, I want to tell him how much I enjoyed his speech."

In the act of shaking hands, Colonel Churchill had an opportunity to say without being overheard:

"I expect to have good news for you in a few days, little Countess, concerning your Good Samaritan quest. But don't tell the little girl, Peggy, until I am more sure of my facts."

CHAPTER X

Two Newcomers

"PEGGY, I have something important to say to you."

Peggy Harper was in the drawing-room one morning dusting and setting things to rights and so interested in her task that she had not heard Bianca Zoli enter. Although not a Red Cross nurse, Peggy had become a Red Cross girl in "The House of the Golden Wish," She wore a white Red Cross apron over her blue cotton dress.

As she and Bianca faced each other they were not unlike in appearance, except that Peggy was younger and had blue eyes, while Bianca's eyes were dark and an unusual contrast with her gold hair. Then Peggy looked like a girl who had been sheltered and seen little of the world. Bianca possessed the maturity long characteristic of her and due to her mixed inheri-

tances, Italian and American. Moreover, Bianca now wore her hair in a low coil at the back of her neck, while Peggy's hair, half silver, half gold, it was so fair, hung to her shoulders and was tied back with a velvet ribbon.

"Charlotta is in town having lunch with Colonel Churchill," Bianca continued in an apparently irrelevant fashion. "And in half an hour I am going into Washington for my French and music. Charlotta suggested that I bring you to Colonel Churchill's to join them."

"Is this the important thing you have to say to me?" Peggy inquired, her expression not impatient, but grave and a little sad.

"Oh, there is a definite reason why Colonel Churchill and Charlotta want to see you. I might as well speak plainly, since you must learn the truth in a little while. Colonel Churchill and Charlotta believe they have found your brother, but they are not sure. They cannot be sure because he himself is not able to prove his identity."

"Not able to prove his identity?" Peggy repeated. "I am afraid I don't understand."

"No, I presume you cannot," Bianca returned gently, "yet if you had seen only a portion of what I beheld in Europe as a Red Cross girl you might be able to guess. Your brother was gassed during one of the final attacks of the enemy. If it is your brother whom Colonel Churchill has located he is in a hospital in Washington suffering from a nervous breakdown. He talks very little, but says he *thinks* his name is Martin Harper, although he has no recollection of a sister or of his former home."

"Then why should Colonel Churchill and Charlotta believe the young man is my brother?" Peggy inquired, her voice shaking, yet making a strong effort to retain her self-control. "Martin Harper is not an ordinary name and yet is not so unusual that some one else might not possess it. I cannot think it possible that my brother should have forgotten me and his past life. Colonel Churchill and Charlotta have been wonderfully kind and I am deeply grateful, but they must have made a mistake."

"Sit down, dear, for a few moments," Bianca proposed. "Perhaps you would like to have Sonya or Dr. Clark talk to you. Sonya suggested that I speak to you first and then she would see you later if you liked. You see, my dear, your brother is not himself. The reason Colonel Churchill and Charlotta think he is your brother is not because of what he has said or what he recalls. Through certain papers and methods employed by the government for identification, the young man appears to be Martin Harper from Tennessee, a former United States army lieutenant. Letters were written to Tennessee saying he was being cared for at the St. Elizabeth Hospital in Washington City, but they were never answered."

"No, there was no one at home to reply," Peggy returned in a childish fashion. "It is as if the little town where we once lived had disappeared and we had no friends. Take me to Martin. Perhaps even if he is ill, he will know me when we see each other. I cannot believe he has forgotten me."

"Very well, Peggy, Dr. Clark is to drive

us into the National Capital in a few moments. He wants to see Colonel Churchill and perhaps go to the hospital. There is one thing I want you to remember. Perhaps you have forgotten, but you said to Charlotta and me not long ago that possibly you and your brother might find difficulty in recognizing each other. You were only a little girl when he left home and now nearly five years have passed."

"Yes, but I shall know Martin even if he fails to recognize me," Peggy returned. "And that will be the important thing with me first to know that my brother is alive. Afterwards when he is stronger he will be more sure of me and the past."

Peggy had risen from her chair and started toward the door, when Bianca's hand on her arm restrained her.

"You do realize that your brother may appear greatly changed, Peggy? Not only will there be the difference made by the long years, but you must remember all he has endured, all he is still suffering."

"Oh, yes, I understand," yet Peggy's expression and tone carried no comfort or conviction to Bianca.

How childish Peggy was and how little she knew of life! The very fact that they had discovered a girl of her gentle breeding in an East Side tenement without friends and entirely unconscious of her danger was a sufficient proof. Nevertheless, she had found friends, and seemed daily to increase their number.

Bianca placed her arm about the younger girl, feeling relieved that her responsibility in the present situation was over. What Peggy wished to do was exactly what Charlotta and Colonel Churchill had decided was the better part of wisdom.

If Peggy could herself see and recognize her brother, added to the other proofs, they might be reasonably sure of his identity. If she failed to recognize him there might be a doubt. The fact that the young officer responded to the name of Martin Harper was not enough in itself. He might be suffering from a confusion of personality, since his nurses insisted he had called himself by another name upon his arrival at the hospital.

"You'll let me help you get ready, Peggy," Bianca proposed.

"No, go and tell Mrs. Clark that I am all right and she is not to worry over me. She has been wonderfully kind with all her other cares. Ask her for me, when Martin is well, may I bring him here to 'The House of the Golden Wish.' He is sure to recover here as everyone else is doing."

"Of course," Bianca returned. "Only you realize it may be a long time."

"I don't in the least believe Peggy Harper realizes what lies ahead of her, Sonya," Bianca remarked a few moments later. "I know no one so ignorant of life."

"Don't make yourself miserable, Bianca," Sonya protested. "Dear me, I had intended that you spend this year at boarding-school in order to be away from our Red Cross difficulties! But I suppose it is only fair to wait until next year. Fortunately here at the National Capital one can find almost the best girls' schools in the country. Don't neglect your work at present even if I have no opportunity to look after you as I should. Carlo was talking to me about you the other evening and I believe was reproaching me. As for Peggy, remember Colonel

Churchill and Charlotta would not have the little girl see her brother (I suppose he is her brother) if they feared he would be a great shock to her. I believe he is only dazed and uncertain, both physically and mentally. Dr. Clark has already agreed with Colonel Churchill that, if the young man proves to be Peggy's brother and it is possible for us to look after him, he will bring him here as soon as he can be moved.

"Now kiss me and run away, Bianca, as I have a dozen things to do at once. And remember faithfully to keep on with your French and music. You are not forgetting your Italian?"

Bianca shook her head.

"No, I don't forget. Later on, Sonya, when you are not so busy, I want to ask you something. Is there any way in which I can find out if my mother is still alive?

"Do you think I might write to my foster brother, Paulo Zoli? He takes no more interest in me, yet perhaps he would answer."

Sonya Clark hesitated. Bianca had come to seem like her own child since her

adoption of her in Italy.* Now any reference to Bianca's history before their meeting troubled her. Yet one could not expect or wish Bianca altogether to forget her own mother's tragic and disastrous existence.

"Why, naturally Paulo will answer if he receives a letter from you, Bianca. Yet one cannot count on his knowing what has happened to your mother. I'll write him if you prefer."

"I would rather talk it over with you first before we decide," Bianca answered and went away to join Peggy.

The following week two newcomers were made members of the family at "The House of the Golden Wish."

One of them was presumably Martin Harper, the young American officer. It was Peggy Harper's impression that the young man was her brother, although a number of details troubled and confused her more than she confessed to her friends.

Assuredly her brother had changed more than she had dreamed it possible that any

*See "Red Cross Girls with the Italian Army."

human being could change in the course of a few years. He appeared ten or fifteen years older than she expected. His hair, which had been light brown, was now gray, he was taller and thinner and his features more prominent. But all this, as had been explained to her and as she herself could understand, might have been due to what he had suffered.

Even though his eyes were the same in color and shape, yet their expression had altered. The Martin she recalled had been gay and domineering, the present Martin was gentle and fearful.

Notwithstanding, Peggy announced to her friends that her brother had been found. She had been almost convinced of the fact at their first meeting and believed she would grow more positive as time went on and Martin became more like his former self. His physicians suggested this might be possible.

Moreover, the young man had appeared to have a slight recollection of Peggy after seeing her and listening to her story of their past life. He never seemed definite

concerning either his own history or hers.

As a matter of fact, it would not have been possible under existing conditions to have brought the young officer to "The House of the Golden Wish," save that the little Countess Charlotta insisted she would devote herself to him as completely as possible. The soldiers suffering from shell shock, from mental or nervous breakdowns, once on the road to convalescence were more apt to improve under the care and guidance of a single, sympathetic individual than under general treatment. This was the consensus of opinion among the great nerve specialists employed by the government. At present Charlotta Scherin had concluded that her one desire in life was to enroll herself as a Red Cross girl and undertake the care of Peggy's brother with such help as Peggy herself would be able to give.

The action may have been due to one of Charlotta's sudden enthusiasms and might be short-lived. However, she went at it with her ususal energy and determination. Undoubtedly the little Luxemburg Countess

had taken a sudden fancy to Peggy Harper, who appeared in need of help. But also she may have wished to point an object lesson. It is just possible that she may have decided to show that there were other persons capable of self-sacrifice and devotion beside Nora Jamison.

The other newcomer to "The House of the Golden Wish" was Timothy Brackett, whose family had rescued Peggy at the time of her illness. Since then Dr. David Clark had been interested in the young man and his effort to recover his strength and return to work.

CHAPTER XI

Tests

IF Charlotta did not find her new responsibility as easy or pleasing as in the beginning because of her ignorance she may have hoped, nevertheless for the present she was keeping to her task gallantly.

There was one reason which may have spurred Charlotta, who was temperamentally obstinate—the attitude of her friends. Without absolutely opposing the idea, Sonya Clark had shown no enthusiasm at Charlotta's decision to become a Red Cross girl and help with the care of the soldiers at "The House of the Golden Wish."

She was acquainted with Charlotta's history, knew that although her father and aunt had endeavored to bring her up with discipline and severity, they had been unsuccessful, since in the end Charlotta had nearly always managed to gain her own way.

Beautiful and daring, with an independent

fortune inherited from her French mother, it was not easy to guess what her personal influence might be. Ordinarily generous, frank and sweet-tempered, she possessed other traits of character not so disarming.

Then there was Susan Pringle, Charlotta's English chaperon.

Personally she enjoyed living for a time at "The House of the Golden Wish," where she might make herself useful and be relieved from the responsibility of guarding the young Countess from too interesting adventures at *all* times and seasons. Yet for Charlotta's own sake she objected to her determination to become a Red Cross girl and devote a number of months to the work. During the war the Red Cross had been essential, and many girls in Charlotta's position had devoted their time and energy to its various demands. But now the war was over, Miss Pringle could not view the circumstances in the same light.

She and Charlotta had come to the United States to travel, at least this had been their original plan. During the first few months they had gone about from place

to place, covering more ground than Miss Pringle could have imagined, having spent all her previous existence in England and the small Duchy of Luxemburg. Then weary of the constant change and receiving a letter from Bianca Zoli, to whom she was deeply attached, Charlotta had thrust herself and her companion upon their former friends. Now they had become accepted members of the household.

One or two consolations had Susan Pringle in the present situation: Charlotta appeared to her safe from any possible romance. The young American officer who had seemed interested in her during their stay in Coblenz now showed her no attention. Moreover, he was too ill to be concerned with anything save his own recovery. Personally Susan Pringle liked Major Jimmie Hersey, thinking him more of a gentleman than one ordinarily met in America. She herself often talked to him for a few moments at a time, inquiring concerning his health. Charlotta seemed entirely indifferent and more interested in the welfare of every soldier in "The House of the Golden Wish" than in Major Hersey.

But these were negative consolations. Charlotta's friendship with the young American officer Susan never had regarded with any seriousness; at present her positive pleasure was in Charlotta's acquaintance with Colonel Churchill and the entertainment he appeared to gain from her society. He seemed to have some proper appreciation of Charlotta's position in the world, which the girl herself was so apt to forget, in spite of Susan's repeated admonitions.

In any case, Colonel Churchill had talked to Susan Pringle, urging her to permit the young Countess to do what she wished for a few months, although Susan felt powerless to prevent her doing otherwise. In that case the little Countess would be near the National Capital, and he himself would see that she became familiar with Washington and with Washington society. As a visitor to the United States she could not have a better opportunity than by meeting some of the prominent men and women in official life.

Susan agreed with this; she was a little annoyed that the elderly Colonel appeared

to take an almost equal interest in Peggy Harper, but this she could understand was kindness on his part, as the girl was a southerner and in a very trying position. If her brother recovered, under her own and Charlotta's care, her position would be far happier.

But that Charlotta was really going to be of much help to the young American lieutenant in his effort to regain his health, both mental and physical, after a complete nervous breakdown, Susan Pringle was exceedingly dubious. From her own experience of her charge, devoted as she was to the young Countess, Charlotta was more apt to precipitate a nervous breakdown upon the individual who attempted to control her than to aid in curing any one suffering from the misfortune.

However, there was one thing of which Susan Pringle was convinced: one must never be too sure of Charlotta in any particular. More than once she had managed to accomplish what appeared impossible, such as the conquest of her father and his consent to their trip to the United States.

Bianca herself, though never doubting her friend's intention, was doubtful whether Charlotta had either the patience or sympathy necessary to her self-imposed task. Yet since Charlotta declared that she wished to help Peggy Harper in her effort to restore her brother to a normal state of mind, and since the task was not only Peggy's duty but a necessity, and since she announced herself as wholly unequal to the task alone, why one could scarcely deny Peggy the aid and inspiration she so much needed from the older girl.

And of course the two girls were not alone in their effort.

As a matter of fact, every member of the household at "The House of the Golden Wish" helped in greater or less degree. But possibly because they arrived upon the same day, or because of his original interest and kindness to Peggy Harper, Timothy Brackett was of more use than any one else.

It was he who occupied the same room with the former American lieutenant and frequently spent hours with Peggy and

Charlotta in their attempts to entertain and stimulate the young officer into an effort to recall something of his past life and to display an interest in his future.

The task was a difficult one. Peggy Harper was most discouraged by her brother's condition and lack of memory.

Surely it was difficult to influence this listless young fellow who would sit for hours without moving and apparently without thinking, and then suffer a sudden attack of nervous terror when nothing had occurred to disturb him. More of a father than a brother was the Martin Peggy recalled in the old days before the war. How long ago they now seemed! Then he had been cheerful and imperious, had insisted that she spend less time with her old Scotch nurse and more with the other little girls in the town in which they were living. At the outbreak of the war in Europe he had been studying law in the office of their guardian. But from the moment Germany entered Belgium Martin Harper took no further interest in his studies.

Peggy recalled how many times she had begged her brother not to leave home, fearing they would not see each other again and dreading her own loneliness if anything should happen to him. Yet his answer always had been that their ancestors had been soldiers and that he must play a part in the greatest war the world had ever known.

Now Martin could recall nothing of his high ambition nor of his life before the war. The experiences during the war which he could remember it would have been wiser had he been able to forget.

Indeed, Peggy oftentimes doubted whether the young man could be her brother, Martin. She might have confessed her discouragement except for the kindness of Charlotta Scherin and Timothy Brackett, two human beings as widely separated by inheritance and environment as could be conceived, and yet oddly brought into the same surroundings by one of the many freaks of circumstance.

Moreover, Charlotta and Timothy had a certain understanding and appreciation of each other.

One radiant June morning the four of them, Peggy, Charlotta, Timothy Brackett, and the young officer who was presumedly Martin Harper, had been spending the morning together out of doors. It was Doctor Clark's order that Martin Harper be kept in the fresh air and away from all noise and excitement whenever it was possible. Because it was Saturday Timothy was not at the agricultural school where he spent the greater portion of each day.

Instead the four young persons were together at the end of the garden and not far from the bank of the river.

Charlotta was engaged in trying to interest the young American officer, whom she regarded as her particular charge, in a simple experiment in wood-carving, for which she happened to have a talent. She had studied it some time before.

According to the advice of an eminent nerve specialist Lieutenant Harper must be taught to take an interest in some form of handicraft. Later he might learn a trade and the effort would be helpful toward his final recovery.

So far, however, his interest had been difficult to develop. This morning Charlotta found herself doing the greater part of the work while her patient looked aimlessly about him or appeared to listen in a half-hearted fashion to the conversation going on between Peggy and Timothy Brackett.

"What is it you are studying, Mr. Brackett?" Peggy inquired. The former private soldier had scarcely lifted his eyes from the pages of the magazine he held in his hands since he had escorted the girls and their charge to their present position. Dr. Clark and Mrs. Clark were not willing that they should go any distance away from the house alone with their patient.

"Oh, nothing that would not bore you, Miss Peggy," the young man replied. "I know I have already said enough to you about my desire to become a farmer and to get away from the old East Side New York life to make you wish you had never seen or heard of me. Some day I believe the government may give the soldiers who want the opportunity the chance to start life as

men behind the plough instead of the gun. Dr. Clark agrees with me and that is why I am hard at work. I am so much better since I got away from the crowding and fretting, because I was not strong enough after my wound healed to go on with any worth-while work, that I presume I won't remain long at 'The House of the Golden Wish.' I want to make the best of my time while I am here. At present I am reading agricultural reports of the United States government. Queer if they want farmers so much they won't give a few ex-soldiers a little land, which we could pay for in time."

Peggy nodded sympathetically.

Besides appreciating his former kindness to her and his present kindness to her brother, she liked Timothy Brackett very much personally. He was a simple, straightforward fellow, fairly well educated, although coming from plain people. Nevertheless, he was intelligent and ambitious and anxious to make the best of every opportunity, and although a newcomer to "The House of the Golden Wish," extremely popular.

"Oh, I am sure I would not worry if I were you," the younger of the two girls answered. "You will have the farm you dream of some day. I too would like to spend my days in the country if it were half as lovely as here. I am not like Charlotta, I am afraid of people, I have led such a quiet life until the last year. But you know, I can't be sorry you were living in the tenement where I tried so unsuccessfully to take care of myself. I don't know what would have become of me except for your family and you."

"You had no right to have been there even for a few days," Timothy Brackett answered warmly. "I felt it from the moment I first saw you. It was as if a little white bird had wandered in amid a lot of city swallows. No telling what they might have done to you. Lucky thing you fell ill when you did and the Red Cross rescued you! I wonder how many persons in this world have reason to be grateful to the Red Cross, women and children as well as soldiers?"

"Yes, I suppose I was foolish to think I

could support myself and live alone, when I had always been taken care of almost as if I were a baby. I suppose it was because I was such a baby that I made the attempt. But I did not have any money and I did not know what to do. Martin," Peggy turned to the young officer, who at the sound of his name apparently realized he was being spoken to directly, "do you know that our former guardian with whom you were studying law before you went to the war is dead and his affairs are in a dreadful tangle? Mrs. Clark received a letter explaining that this was why I had never heard or received the money I expected. Finally when his papers were looked over and my letters discovered, I had disappeared from the address Nanna and I had given. I thought our former landlady would forward my letters to the tenement, but probably she was too busy to take the trouble."

"You poor child," Charlotta murmured, "I can't bear to think of any human being alone in New York City without money, and least of all, you!"

"Oh, well, I see no point in worrying when it is all over and I have made so many friends," Peggy replied. "Besides, I suppose Martin and I will not be altogether paupers, as I feared, once our affairs are straightened out. You know we own a good deal of land; Martin used to say we were land poor, but he always hated farming and said that the men who rented our land on shares never made the best of it. I suppose we could sell some of our land when Martin is better and we leave here."

Charlotta Scherin glanced up from her work. "When Martin is better." The phrase had a very doubtful sound in her ears. For a moment she wished the two men might have changed places and that Timothy Brackett were Peggy's brother rather than the other young fellow. Peggy needed some one to care for her and even if Timothy were plain, he was strong and kind and fond of the young girl whom he had been able to befriend. With her own brother she had not much outlook for either happiness or protection. Indeed, she would probably be forced to be *his* guide

and protector, and certainly she appeared unfitted for the task.

"I wish I had a few thousand dollars so I could buy a little of the extra land you own. *I'd* make it pay and would not mind living down south and raising corn and tobacco. The idea sounds good to me."

"I wish I had money enough to give the few thousands of dollars to you," Charlotta remarked in her usual impulsive fashion. "Then you would be able to watch over Peggy and Lieutenant Harper when I am compelled to leave. Colonel Churchill has such heaps of money, I don't see why he does not let you have what you need. I wish I had the courage to ask him."

"Please don't think of such a thing," the young soldier answered quickly. "Colonel Churchill is doing enough when he provides a home like this."

So Charlotta said nothing more on the subject, turning her attention toward her charge again and trying to persuade him to whittle her two squares of wood of the same size. They were supposed to be making a book rack together. She had observed that

Lieutenant Harper had not paid any further attention to what Peggy had said after first answering to his name.

Afterwards Charlotta shut herself from the conversation of her other companions and tried to talk to Martin Harper as simply as one would speak to a little child.

Now and then he would answer, "yes" or "no", but nothing else. And never for five minutes at a time could he be persuaded to hold the knife in his hand with which he was supposed to be working.

However, Charlotta kept at her task valiantly. Yet when a bell in a church tower not far away struck twelve she jumped up quickly.

"There, I had forgotten to tell you, I am going in to Washington to meet some friends of Colonel Churchill's this afternoon. You won't mind if I leave you and ask you to bring Lieutenant Harper to the house."

A little ashamed of herself, Charlotta hurried away. An hour longer she might have remained with her charge and still be in time for her engagement. Yet suddenly she had realized that she could not be

patient another moment without betraying her irritation. This endless sitting still was what made the task she had assumed more difficult than she had imagined. It was not the nervous strain upon her of which Susan Pringle and Mrs. Clark had both warned her, but the physical strain which she at times found unendurable.

How any sane human being could endure sitting still in one place for any length of time, Charlotta never had understood in her life.

Hurrying back to the house, she made up her mind to see if she could arrange to ride horseback for an hour or so every day, as she had been accustomed to doing. She would speak of her wish to Colonel Churchill and perhaps they could occasionally ride together.

CHAPTER XII

Approaching a Reconciliation

HURRYING toward the house and wondering if her companions had noticed her impatience, unexpectedly Charlotta discovered Major Jimmie Hersey walking slowly up and down a few yards from the chair where he usually remained seated when out of doors.

Impulsively Charlotta rushed forward and without waiting for permission slipped her arm through his.

"I was afraid you might fall, I have not seen you walking alone for so long," she stammered in unusual embarrassment. "Do you think you should be making such an exertion?"

Whatever good resolutions one may have made in the past, was it possible they could be expected to hold out against such generous friendliness? For some little time Major Hersey and Charlotta had scarcely

done more than bow to each other and had not exchanged a dozen words.

Now Jimmie Hersey found himself flushing in the stupid fashion he was never able to control.

"Oh, I am all right, thank you," he managed to say. "In fact, I am getting so much stronger Dr. Clark has suggested that I indulge in a little strenuous exercise such as walking up and down a few paces. A change, isn't it, from marching through France and Belgium and Luxemburg to the banks of the Rhine?"

"But I should think one might enjoy a little rest," Charlotta urged. "Don't you think you might sit down now for a while and let us have a short talk. I was hurrying into the house because I am going to Washington this afternoon to be introduced to some friends of Colonel Churchill and to see something more of the National Capital. But I really was not in so much of a hurry as I pretended. I suddenly grew too nervous to keep still any longer. But what a dreadfully selfish thing for me to say to you, you who have been keeping quiet for

months, and I know you like it as little as I do. Please forgive me. I do wish I were a little more like Nora Jamison; every one of the soldiers speaks of how sympathetic and wonderful she is. I don't like her very much, and yet I realize she would never have made a speech like that."

"Yes, but Miss Jamison is older and has been trained in a different school from you, little Countess," Major Jimmie replied, allowing Charlotta to place him in his chair and fuss over him in a fashion which he usually disliked.

Moreover, Charlotta offered no objection to Major Hersey's calling her "little Countess," a title he often chose for her, whatever her objection to its use by other persons.

She sat down now on a low bench not far away and, resting her chin in her hand, dropped into an unusual silence, considering the fact that she had just suggested having a talk with her present companion.

She was wearing a Red Cross apron entirely covering the rest of her costume and the little white cap sedately pinned over her

dark hair, a contrast to the picture of her Major Hersey usually recalled, riding at breakneck speed with him along the yellow banks of the Rhine.

"Curious that we should meet here in the United States!" he began, this being the last thing in the world he had wished to say. "I thought when you said good-by to me in Germany a year of more ago that we had vanished from each other's lives forever. Anything else seems incredible to me even now."

"Oh, well, perhaps our good-by was only delayed and the second will be final. You and I shall not stay always at 'The House of the Golden Wish,' and we are not apt to run across each other a third time. I suppose you are one of the persons who think I have made a mistake in attempting any serious Red Cross work. But please don't discourage me to-day, I am already sufficiently cast down. I thought perhaps I *could* help Peggy Harper's brother as Miss Jamison has been able to help you. Don't you suppose I have been able to notice the change in you since you have been friends?

Yet this morning I feel as if some one with more experience or a more self-sacrificing disposition ought to have undertaken the duty. Dr. Clark and other physicians and Colonel Churchill said the first thing for me to attempt was to try to interest Lieutenant Harper in something, persuade him to concentrate upon a simple task so that he might forget what was troubling him. I have not succeeded, yet Nora Jamison seems to have had no difficulty in succeeding with you."

Throwing back his head, Jimmie Hersey laughed as he had not in a long time.

"See here, little Countess, perhaps I should not have laughed," he said finally, "but do you think Lieutenant Harper's case and mine similar? I know that I have been knocked out physically and that I was pretty badly depressed, but it did not occur to me that any one would think I was suffering from a mental or a nervous breakdown. Well, I am glad I have improved if that is the case."

This time it was Charlotta who blushed.

"Oh, no, I did not mean that, I am fool-

ish," she urged. "I was only wondering what it was that Miss Jamison had done to cheer you up and if you would be willing to tell me. I know I am curious, but I don't think I wish to know this because of my curiosity. You believe I am glad for your sake?"

The girl looked so pretty and so unusually humble that Major Jimmie did his best not to stare at her too fixedly, yet not with much success.

"Why, of course I'll be glad to tell you," he answered. "First of all, Miss Jamison helped me not to be so sorry for myself by pointing out that a good soldier, such as I have always hoped to be, does not lie down when he has bad luck in a battle. He gets ready for the next fight. She suggested that one of the ways in which I might manage to do this was by not wasting all the leisure I have thrust upon me these days. She mentioned that I too might try to follow Colonel Churchill's advice and get a little bit farther ahead because of my present handicap than if things had all been plain sailing. Fact is I was sitting here in this chair mentally be-

wailing my lot, even if I tried not to bore people by saying too much aloud. But I have liked watching the other fellows working hard at the new occupations they are trying to learn. Some of them are great, aren't they? They are not complaining and not wasting time. So, although I never was much given to studying in the past, Dr. Clark said it might be a good plan if I gave up a few hours a day to reading, so as not to make the hours go by too slowly. I have been reading the biographies of famous soldiers and then their military ideas and plans. I have even had the nerve lately to write down a few of my own ideas. The United States is not a military country and God knows the men who fought in Europe will be the last on earth who will wish to go to war again. Yet we surely have to keep a few soldiers on hand in order to see that the right man and the right country win. I told you it was one of my ambitions to continue as one of those soldiers. Yet if it is not possible that I shall see active service again, I may learn to be useful to the War Department in some other way.

"So I have made up my mind at least to *try* to get well. To tell you the truth, I was not trying before I came to 'The House of the Golden Wish.' Now I plan to stay here this summer and then go out West when the fall comes to some place where I can live out of doors."

"Nora Jamison comes from the west, doesn't she?" Charlotta inquired so irrelevantly that Jimmie Hersey believed she had taken little interest in what he had just confided to her.

"Why, yes, I believe so," he returned. "I think she did say that she came originally from California. But what difference does that make?"

Charlotta sighed.

"No difference, of course; only I was wondering if you might not find California a pleasant place in which to spend next winter? I had planned to go West before I returned to Luxemburg, but if I stay here for so many months, I may decide I had best return to my father."

"Then don't stay here too long," Major Hersey urged. "You see, little Countess,

you ought to have a different experience in the United States than living here and being a Red Cross girl. I am sure Mrs. Clark can find some one to take your place with Lieutenant Harper, who would perhaps be more successful than you say you are. The thing for you to do is to meet all the prominent people you can in Washington and go to dances and receptions and have a bully time. Why, it is like taking a cardinal, the Kentucky red bird, and shutting her up in a cage, to keep you here."

But instead of Charlotta's being pleased by this compliment, wounded, she got up slowly from her seat.

"So you do not think there is a possibility of my learning to become a useful person? And you are so anxious not to see me again that you even desire me to leave 'The House of the Golden Wish' almost at once. I do not understand, Major Jimmie, why you will not be better friends."

Charlotta put out her hand with a little friendly, appealing gesture.

"At first I was cross and wounded because you liked Miss Jamison more than you

liked me; we had been more intimate friends when we parted in Europe. But now I have gotten over being hurt and understand it is because Miss Jamison really is nicer and can do more for you. Yet I think you might be a little nice to me, too."

There was nothing for Major Jimmie to do but to take Charlotta's hand, yet he held it barely an instant.

"You do not understand, little Countess, and I never intend that you shall," he insisted. "But you are mistaken if you don't think I appreciate your friendliness not alone to me, but to everybody. You are one of the most generous and natural people in the world. I hope I have not failed in the proper attitude for an humble soldier to show to so lovely and aristocratic a lady."

"Oh, but you are hateful!" Charlotta answered with a little stamp of her foot, and hurried indoors.

CHAPTER XIII

A Reception

"BUT, Colonel Churchill, why didn't you or Bianca tell me that we were going to a reception at the White House this afternoon? Suppose I had not worn my best clothes!"

Colonel Churchill smiled, bowing with old-fashioned gallantry.

"It would never occur to me, or to any one else that the little Countess's costumes are not always perfection. But perhaps I should have told you, only Miss Bianca and I desired the occasion to be an entire surprise. The White House has been closed to all entertaining for so long a time, but this afternoon there is to be a reception in honor of several Red Cross workers who are in the National Capital for the first time since their return from Europe. There will be a variety of guests, members of the Cabinet, Senate and Congress. There

may also be a few humble persons. In fact, I have heard that the White House has for some time wished to open its doors to the returned American soldiers who are having vocational training in Washington, not all of them of course, but a representative number. I am sorry we could not arrange an entirely distinguished company in honor of the Countess Charlotta Scherin."

"So you do think the American soldiers who fought and saved the country are less distinguished than the politicians who remained at home?" Charlotta inquired, flushing and speaking in her usual impetuous fashion.

Then observing that Colonel Churchill was laughing at her and that his final remark had been made to provoke her retort, she glanced around the room where she and Bianca Zoli were seated.

Colonel Churchill, having given his country home and the greater part of his large income for the use of the wounded soldiers under the care of the Red Cross, was nevertheless living in extremely comfortable fashion in the National Capital. His

Washington house was a low two story and a half building with a basement kitchen. The house was of red brick, a style most common to Washington half a century ago, when the city possessed a more southern atmosphere and appearance than it does to-day.

The drawing-room was old-fashioned and severe, with a plain velvet carpet on the floor, heavy curtains at the windows and portraits of the Colonel's early Virginia forebears on the walls.

The furniture was massive and dark but comfortable.

Bianca and Charlotta had just been drinking an extremely early afternoon tea from china teacups which Colonel Churchill assured them had belonged to his great grandmother.

In answer to the suggestion that they did not care for tea so soon after lunch, the Colonel had explained that it would be wisdom to sustain themselves before setting out to a White House reception.

"The crowd may be exceptionally large at the White House this afternoon, as it

has been closed to entertaining for so long. This means we may have to stand in line an hour or more before shaking hands with the Vice-President and his wife. The President will scarcely appear and his wife is seldom seen without him."

Half an hour later, Bianca and Charlotta, under the escort of Colonel Churchill, were being driven toward the White House in an open carriage of a style popular twenty-five years ago.

"I am sure this is ever so much pleasanter than an automobile," Bianca exclaimed, folding her hands in her lap and gazing about her. "It is such a wonderful day, Washington is so lovely and there are so many people about! I could not bear to be hurried along without seeing as much as possible. Do you know, Colonel, I am one of the persons who enjoy old-fashioned things and Charlotta is the opposite. I feel I shall never grow tired of Washington, although whenever I have the slightest opportunity I spend the time sight-seeing, sometimes alone. Charlotta, we must go some day to the Congressional Library.

We won't bore the Colonel to act as our escort because I am sure he must have grown weary of it. I may not be a good judge, but I am sure I never saw such wonderful frescoes in my life, although when I was a little girl I used to be taken to a number of the famous art galleries in Italy."

"I am always at your service, Miss Zoli," the Colonel returned. "If I should grow tired looking at the beauties of the new Congressional Library, does it not occur to you that I can always find pleasure in my companions?"

As a matter of fact, Colonel Churchill was proud of the two young Red Cross girls who were at present under his protection. They were a striking and charming contrast to each other, Charlotta tall, slender and vivid with dark hair and eyes and a brilliant color; Bianca small, reserved, with pale gold hair and a look of delicate refinement.

To-day Charlotta wore black, which was a curious fancy of hers for a summer costume, but the dress was of the sheerest black net and without trimming save a

broad satin belt of the new shade of henna. Her hat was of black tulle with a satin bow of the same color. The costume was extremely effective, as Charlotta knew, and would be conspicuous in the midst of the light silks and muslins which would be more popular.

Ordinarily Bianca dressed very simply but in extremely good taste, as Sonya Clark had unusual wisdom in the choice of clothes. This afternoon, wishing to look her best for a special reason, she wore a soft white silk with sprays of pale yellow roses over it and a black straw hat with a band of the yellow flowers. Both girls wore long coats of light weight material over their frocks.

A June day Washington appeared en fête. Motor cars and a few old-fashioned carriages resembling the Colonel's formed a long line from the White House gate to the noble entrance.

The building had but lately received its annual spring painting, so that it glistened in the sunlight. The fountain was playing before the front portico, splashing tiny

crystal drops on the beds of forget-me-not and purple pansies surrounding it.

"Colonel Churchill, you said you wished to introduce me to several prominent people this afternoon if you have the opportunity," Charlotta said unexpectedly, when their carriage had come to a standstill not far from the entrance to the home of the United States Chief Executive. She had been unusually silent for the past half hour, leaving the effort to entertain their escort to Bianca.

"Yes, that is my intention. I would like you to see another side of Washington life than the effort we are attempting to make for our injured soldiers. Is there any special person you would like to meet, Countess Charlotta?"

Charlotta nodded.

"Yes, I would like to meet the Secretary of War. Now, Bianca, don't smile and think I am impertinent. I have a particular reason. He may be entertained at meeting me because it happens that one of my uncles is the Secretary of War in Luxemburg, although our entire army would not fill a single United States war camp."

"But why the Secretary of War, Charlotta?" Bianca teased. "See here, Colonel Churchill, Charlotta is a very far-sighted person and I believe she wishes to ask the Secretary of War for an appointment for one of our soldiers at 'The House of the Golden Wish'. I don't know which one, only Charlotta is always trying to befriend some one. Don't ask for the appointment the moment you are introduced, Charlotta," Bianca protested.

"Don't be absurd, Bee," Charlotta returned, slightly offended. "It is only that my father will be interested in what I can tell him of the distinguished American statesmen."

At this moment their carriage drew up directly in front of the Executive Mansion. A moment later they had entered the spacious vestibule and were on their way to the historic East Room, where the reception was to take place.

Standing in line in the vast East Room, eighty feet in length and half as wide, and divided in her attention between studying the length size portraits of former Presi-

dents ornamenting the walls, and the living crowd itself, while Colonel Churchill and Charlotta talked in whispers, Charlotta inquiring concerning the various distinguished personages, Bianca Zoli was startled by a light touch on her arm and a voice exclaiming,

"Bianca, the good fairies are with me to-day! Here I came to Washington to say good-by to you and Sonya, drove out to 'The House of the Golden Wish' and found you away. By accident some one persuaded me to come to the White House reception and I find myself only a few feet from you!"

The speaker was Carlo Navara, who had been Bianca's intimate friend for several years.

Bianca's face wore a look she reserved only for two people, although Carlo was unaware of this—for Sonya Clark and for him.

"It is always to say good-by to you, Carlo. I sometimes wonder if I will ever do anything else? And yet it is a pleasure to see you again. Where are you off to this time?"

"I am starting West on a concert tour, to be gone six months or a year. If one has a profession like mine it must mean good-by to one's friends many times, until I am so famous a singer that I can rarely be persuaded to leave New York City.

"I have been talking to Sonya of you, Bianca. In Coblenz I objected because Sonya threatened to send you to a fashionable boarding-school and later introduce you in society. Yet now she has done none of these things, I am regretful. You do not mean to give yourself to the Red Cross work forever!"

Bianca hesitated.

"No, Carlo, not to the exclusion of everything else. Yet I do not believe any one who has ever been truly interested can give up the Red Cross work altogether. But you must not trouble about me because I am not doing a great deal at 'The House of the Golden Wish.' Of our old Red Cross girls who were together in Europe, Nora Jamison and Theodosia Thompson are the girls Sonya relies upon. Nora Jamison is a really marvelous person, both as a nurse

and in her personal influence upon the wounded men. It is as if she had some special gift for sympathy and insight with every soldier who has been injured. You know the man to whom she was engaged was killed at Château-Thierry. Then as for Theodosia Thompson, Sonya, who did not like her at first, now declares she is invaluable in helping to keep the whole household entertained. There are of course the other older Red Cross girls, whom I do not know so intimately. But Charlotta Scherin and I, and of course Peggy Harper, are really not tied down to our Red Cross work. If you realized how thoroughly I have investigated Washington since my stay here, you would be convinced. And I am going to a finishing school next autumn as soon as the new term opens. Only a m n would fail to know that the schools are closing now for the summer holidays. Still, Carlo, you need not worry, for I shall never develop into as fashionable a woman as you will require. I shall never be like the fashionable and wealthy girls who must be your friends in the future. I have told

you this before, so why must we speak of it again."

Carlo laughed.

"It is the silent Bianca who for once has been making the speech, not I. But, Bianca dear, to you I confess already I am growing a trifle weary of the women of fashion. However, since half of my success at present depends upon their fancy, I must do my best to win them. Remember, Bianca, whatever you may hear of me in the future, that I realize I am but a child of the people. The great artist must be, and some day when I shall have attained the place in the musical world of which I now dream, I shall become the great people's singer."

Talking in their accustomed fashion of Carlo himself, Bianca and the young man had not realized that the greater part of the line in front of them had reached the Vice-President and his wife and shaken hands. They now had moved on, as their turn was nearly approaching.

A short time after, following Colonel Churchill and Charlotta, they made their

way into the State dining-room, where a number of the guests were in groups talking and waiting for light refreshments to be served.

Discovering the Secretary of War standing with several young American officers and soldiers, Colonel Churchill, remembering Charlotta's request, made his way toward them, indicating that his little party was to follow.

The introductions over and Colonel Churchill having explained Charlotta's presence as a guest in the United States and her work for the American Red Cross, the young Countess turned with a smothered gasp of astonishment to face Major Jimmie Hersey.

"I can't see what in the world you are doing here at a White House reception," she protested. "Besides, why did you not mention you were coming when we talked together this morning? I am sure you are not well enough to be here."

Jimmie Hersey flushed and smiled.

"I did not know this morning, Countess Charlotta, but I should never have imagined

it would interest you. Dr. and Mrs. Clark wished an officer to accompany the soldiers who were to come to the reception this afternoon from 'The House of the Golden Wish,' and Dr. Clark seemed to think I could make the attempt, as I am so much stronger. I am leaving almost at once. I only stopped to speak to the Secretary of War, as he and my father were old friends and I have not seen him since my return."

Charlotta uttered an exclamation of pleased surprise.

"I am glad," she declared. "I have heard that in the United States it is more important to have influential friends than in any other country, and from what you have said about yourself I did not suppose you had friends who amounted to a great deal."

Major Hersey laughed.

"Oh, one can have a few distinguished friends and still remain an humble person. I only did not wish to appear to you under false colors and I assure you that an American officer without a private fortune and without his health has not much prospect for a future."

"I do not believe you," Charlotta returned, not politely. She then devoted her attention to the distinguished middle-aged man whom she had been informed was the Secretary of War in the President's Cabinet.

Soon after Major Jimmie Hersey made his adieus.

CHAPTER XIV

Sonya's Anxiety

IN undertaking the management of "The House of the Golden Wish," Sonya Clark had realized in a large measure not only the importance but the pitfalls in the labor of love for which she and her husband believed they possessed the inspiration and the courage.

With the war over, they had considered, like many other Red Cross workers, that their duty was accomplished. Then peace had worn another aspect than it wears today. In thinking of the soldiers whose lives had been spared by the closing of the war in a measure they had forgotten those who already had paid the penalties.

Coming home to discover so many Americans comparatively untouched by the war, judging by the suffering in Europe, they had felt the common restlessness that beset so many men and women called upon to

give up the war work which for so long had absorbed all their energy, devotion, and thought.

So, unable to settle down to the ordinary life of New York City, they had agreed to the request of Dr. Clark's old friend, Colonel Churchill, and taken charge of his old estate close to the National Capital. From the outset the plan had been to transform it into a model home for the wounded American soldiers in need of vocational training. The opportunity had appeared heaven sent.

But later both Dr. Clark and Sonya were to discover that, like many other heaven-sent opportunities in this life, the results following must be accomplished by slow and earthly methods.

The house itself and a monthly income was donated by Colonel Churchill, but outside of this, generous contributions were made by the Red Cross. Sonya and her husband had been surprised by the response from the Red Cross workers who had served with them in France once they learned of the new character of service. "The House of the Golden Wish" was in no sense to

supplant the effort of the United States toward the rehabilitation of her own men, but merely to take care of a few cases which from one reason or another appeared to have suffered from neglect or delay.

However, the responsibility was for this reason greater. Every Red Cross worker in the household desired the home to be in a way a model for others which later might be organized by the government. At present the government could care for the sick soldiers only in the large army hospitals and sanitariums, where in too many cases as soon as the men began to feel better they insisted upon returning home. Yet in many cases, such as Timothy Brackett's, the homes were not of the character to assist an invalid to recover. There were other soldiers on the road to health and usefulness without homes or families to care for them.

Therefore the very title, "The House of the Golden Wish," implied the desire to offer not only every physical comfort and opportunity, but friendliness and aid and all spiritual help.

Bianca had been right in saying that Sonya Clark had found somewhat unexpected strength and assistance in Nora Jamison and Theodosia Thompson, as well as in several older Red Cross girls. But what Bianca did not realize was that, when given time to think of it, Sonya worried over her three younger aids.

Until the arrival of the little Countess Charlotta, Sonya had not considered either Bianca's or Peggy's position in the household with sufficient seriousness. Bianca she had grown accustomed to having with her through many trying experiences abroad. As for Peggy, there seemed nothing to do with her for the present save to keep her as a member of the family until some word could be heard from the town where she had formerly lived, or some news of her brother ascertained.

Then Charlotta Scherin had appeared for a visit and later determined to become a Red Cross girl, remaining through the summer at "The House of the Golden Wish."

There had seemed no reason to oppose this intention, and Sonya had not opposed

it. Nevertheless, she had since been less comfortable in her point of view.

If Charlotta were generous and sweet she was also impulsive and adventurous, and Sonya's present grievance was the introduction into their household of the young officer who presumably was Peggy Harper's brother, although occasionally Sonya considered that such proof as Peggy had chosen to confide in her was not particularly convincing.

Of course Sonya realized that to hold Charlotta altogether responsible for the presence of Lieutenant Harper was not fair. As a matter of fact, the request to install him as a temporary member of their soldier family had come from Colonel Churchill himself, so that it had been difficult to refuse. However, Sonya believed that the idea had originated in Charlotta's romantic imagination, as for some hidden reason she had of late concluded to establish herself not as a Red Cross girl but as a Red Cross heroine.

Of the motive for this Sonya had only a slight suspicion.

True, her husband and the hospital physicians had agreed that the young officer

had sufficiently recovered from his mental breakdown to require only personal care and friendly interest to make him completely well. Notwithstanding, Sonya after watching pretty carefully for several weeks and talking with Lieutenant Harper whenever it was possible, was not convinced of this fact.

She did not feel that Charlotta's and Peggy's care, assisted by Bianca when she chanced to be at leisure, was the scientific treatment the young officer required. Of this she was perfectly convinced, intending to discuss the subject with her husband later, unless she had cause to change her opinion.

Occasionally however, although ordinarily lasting only a few moments Sonya became seriously disturbed by the possibilities of disaster, if not of positive danger, she saw in the circumstance of the young officer in the charge of three girls of no wisdom or authority.

All morning Sonya had been working with greater energy than usual, permitting herself not a moment of rest or relaxation.

Added to her regular household cares one of her soldiers, as she insisted upon calling the boys at "The House of the Golden Wish," was to say good-by and leave for his home in Nevada. He had recently finished a course in bookkeeping and feeling strong again had accepted a position in a bank in the city where he had lived before entering the army.

So Sonya had his clothes to pack, and a long farewell had to be said between them. The young fellow had no mother and Sonya had grown extremely dear to him. So much did she reciprocate his affection that after lunch when he finally had departed she excused herself, explaining to Miss Blackstone that she was overtired and went up to her own bed-room to lie down. Dr. Clark was in Washington for the day.

But lying down Sonya had no thought of sleep. In fact, she especially desired a quiet hour to read a number of letters, received earlier in the day, which she had not yet had time to glance over.

One was a note from Mildred Thornton, one of the four original Red Cross girls, now

married to Lieutenant Wainwright, a former officer in the United States Marine Corps. Mildred's letter merely asked how affairs were progressing at "The House of the Golden Wish" and stated that she and her husband would soon be in Washington. Mildred could not make up her mind to let a much longer time elapse without seeing her Red Cross friends. The piece of news which they would learn in a short time they must be able to discuss together.

Slightly mystified and yet too tired to try to puzzle over a mystery, tossing the letter aside, Sonya picked up a second letter, mailed in Paris, which gave her a start of surprise.

The second note was written in Italian and was signed by Paulo Zoli, Bianca Zoli's foster brother from whom she had heard nothing since their parting in Italy several years before. The present letter, addressed not to Bianca but to Sonya, was entirely formal. Paulo Zoli explained that he was at present living in Paris as one of the attachés of the Italian Legation. He hoped Bianca and Sonya were well, but would

scarcely have troubled them with a letter, except that he had information in which he presumed they might be interested. The woman, Nannina, who had been their family servant and Bianca's mother, had lately died in Italy. Having betrayed the Italian government, she had been placed in an Italian prison during the war, but released at its close. She had, however, never left the prison hospital and had passed away within a few months after the signing of peace.

All she possessed in the world, a small package of letters, had been sent to the home in Florence where she formerly had been employed.

As the house was now let to certain Italian friends, Paulo Zoli explained that the packet had been forwarded him. He was now taking the risk of having it remailed to the address of a New York banker which Mrs. Clark had informed him would be her permanent address. He was glad to hear of her marriage and particularly of her adoption of his former foster sister, Bianca Zoli. He would like to be remembered to Bianca.

This was all; the letter was courteous but cool and uninterested. One could scarcely have concluded from its tone that Bianca had been brought up by the young Italian's mother as if she were his sister, and that he had promised to care for her as if she were in reality his sister.

However, at the end of the epistle Sonya gave a sigh, partly of regret, but more largely relief. She had never especially liked Paulo Zoli in the Italian days; his brother Eugino, the famous aviator killed in the Alps, had been her own as well as Bianca's favorite. And Paulo probably had never forgiven the disgrace which Bianca's peasant mother had brought upon their home.

So Nannina was dead, a strange, cold, harsh being with no affection save for Bianca's highly bred American father and perhaps for the little girl, her own daughter, for whom she had made such unwise sacrifices both of love and honor.

Personally Sonya could not but be relieved, both for her own and for Bianca's sake, that all links were now broken with Bianca's unhappy past.

Then she looked again at the date of Paulo Zoli's letter.

The letter must have been written at nearly the same time Bianca had surprised her with the request that she write and discover news of her mother.

Well, circumstances of this character were constantly occurring. Human beings have ceased to deny mental telepathy. Do the majority still decline to believe that communications can reach them from the spirit world? Sonya counted herself one of the disbelievers.

However, at present she had no time to waste upon any subject. She must at once find Bianca, show her the letter written by her foster brother, and have a quiet talk with Bianca alone.

Bianca would of course be discovered with the two girls who were her constant companions at the present time, and as it was a lovely afternoon they were probably outdoors.

Simple enough either to banish the others or to take a walk with Bianca.

Thinking of nothing else, Sonya got up and dressed hastily.

She did not recall the fact that on lying down she had carelessly thrust under her pillow a roll of money, five hundred dollars, which had just been sent her from the bank for certain household expenses.

Bianca's room was empty and Charlotta's and Peggy's adjoining it. Nora Jamison could offer no information save that she had heard Bianca say the three girls were going for a long walk some time during the afternoon.

She had not said whether they would be alone.

Outdoors there were always a few soldiers walking about, talking or studying.

Robert Morris declared that he had seen the three girls accompanied by Lieutenant Harper go down to the edge of the garden in the direction of the river. He had thought of suggesting that he accompany them, but as he was hard at work and had a recitation in another hour, he had given up the idea, presuming they were not to go far.

"Does any one know whether Timothy Brackett is anywhere near?" Sonya in-

quired, feeling that it was ridiculous to be nervous and not wishing her present companions to guess her anxiety.

Nevertheless, in the little group of soldiers with whom she was talking there were several who not only guessed but shared her uneasiness. Lieutenant Harper was far from having completely recovered and they had seen other men who had been through the misfortune he was enduring at the present time. Certainly it was hard to count upon what they might think or do at odd moments.

It was a mistake for three young girls to have taken so ill a patient out alone for any distance. And it was against Sonya's and Dr. Clark's orders.

"Will some one please find Timothy Brackett and send him after me. No, no one else need trouble to come with me. I am sure the girls have not gone far from home and I'll follow the direction you tell me they have taken. There is a little tumble-down summer house near the edge of the river which Bianca and Charlotta have been talking of visiting for some time. I'll go there first."

CHAPTER XV

The Rescue

ANTICIPATING that Timothy Brackett would shortly follow her and that he would bring Lieutenant Harper home, Sonya walked on, her momentary nervousness allayed.

In all probability the girls were in the little house near the river bank. Of late there had been some mystery between them which they only faintly dared to suggest in her presence. And although she had made no open comment, naturally she had not been so blind as they presumed.

The little house by the river would be an excellent place for the enjoyment of a secret or a mystery. It was partly in ruins, shrouded in heavy tangled vines and doubtless filled with earwigs. No one was apt to enter the little place, which could only be approached along a single path.

Her own arrival Sonya expected to make

known in sufficient time to avoid all danger of an unwelcome intrusion. She would call out to the three girls as she drew near, so that they could hastily change whatever subject of conversation was interesting them at the moment or enshroud in further darkness their especial secret. Timothy would look after Lieutenant Harper, Peggy and Charlotta could do what they liked and she, Sonya, would have an hour alone with Bianca in which they must discuss many things of the past and a few of the present.

In spite of the fact that it made no actual difference, Sonya did consider that Bianca was actually closer to her, more completely her own daughter, than before poor Nannina's tragic end, although the woman's one plea had been that she take charge of Bianca and that the girl never hear her name spoken again.

So Sonya walked down the golden old garden toward the bank of the river, spying an occasional soldier boy lying hidden behind a tree with a book in his hand, or else working with his tools at the new trade in which he was attempting to become pro-

ficient. To them she waved her hand, calling out gay greetings.

It was an afternoon toward late June and in a southern climate was like midsummer. Sonya was not outdoors as much as she would have liked these days, since she could have wished to spend all her time in the garden like a number of her convalescent soldiers for whom the fresh-air treatment was considered necessary.

So instead of worrying as she had expected, she thought of nothing save the scenery and never looked behind to discover if Timothy Brackett was setting out after her as she had left word he should do. There was really no great hurry for him to appear, as she would remain with the three girls until he did come.

However, although some one was following Sonya to the meeting place of the three girls, it was not the soldier who had grown accustomed to assisting in the care of the young southern lieutenant.

Notwithstanding the fact that half a dozen masculine voices had roared forth Timothy's name soon after Sonya's depart-

ure in an effort to discover him, he was not to be so readily found. Two of the men made a thorough search for him in the house, another in the big workroom over the stable. He was evidently away upon some business.

Yet while the search was going on there was one person who was suffering the uneasiness which Sonya had so quickly surrendered. Major Jimmie Hersey had been in his accustomed place in the garden when Sonya appeared and made her original inquiry. It had occurred to him before, but this time struck him with particular force, that it was an extremely foolish, if not a hazardous proceeding, for three young and comparatively untrained girls to start off on a lonely walk with a soldier who had suffered in the fashion in which Lieutenant Harper had suffered from the nervous shock of war.

Even when apparently restored to health and strength, the old nervous terror was apt on occasions to reassert itself, making the victim scarcely responsible for his actions.

So, when after a few moments there was no sign of Timothy Brackett, without

mentioning the fact to any one else Major Jimmie Hersey rose and started after Mrs. Clark. He was perfectly well able to take the walk and in fact rather enjoyed the prospect. His improvement had been rapid within the past few weeks, thanks to a number of reasons, but all of them to be found at "The House of the Golden Wish."

He too considered the stroll down through the garden and along the river a source of enjoyment, and although keeping Sonya Clark in sight made no effort to join her. There would be time enough when she reached the destination they were both seeking.

And Sonya had been right in her surmise. Charlotta, Bianca and Peggy Harper were at this instant in hiding in the little tumble-down summer house, having a secret meeting to which they had been looking forward for days.

It is true that Lieutenant Harper was with them, but he was being left to his own devices, to wander about the small enclosure and when weary of this limited amusement to sit alone near the door.

There had been no thought originally of bringing the young officer upon the excursion; the idea was wholly Charlotta's. She had seen him moping about the house, uninterested and unhappy, and had proposed that he join them in their walk without considering that he might be in their way or interfere with their program. The young officer was accustomed to sitting in silence for hours at a time, disturbing no one. Therefore neither Peggy nor Bianca had raised any special objection to the addition of his companionship although they had a very definite plan in prospect.

Incredible as it may seem, not once since the afternoon when Bianca had discovered Peggy and Charlotta engaged with the prophetic qualities of the Ouija board had the three girls considered they had a safe opportunity to make another test without fear of interruption.

But once hidden away inside the dilapidated little house by the river, no one would discover them.

Silence and an atmosphere of mystery,

the two most desirable conditions, were here to be almost perfectly attained.

The three girls had confessed to one another that each of them desired to ask a question of the Ouija board of great personal importance.

Frankly Peggy and Bianca told their desires. Bianca wished to learn if the Ouija would speak again, as it had so unexpectedly upon the day she had entered the room without being aware of what was taking place. In her heart of hearts Bianca wished to inquire if the Ouija was able to inform her whether her mother were alive or dead. Insisting that she was possessed of no real faith in the possible answer, she was none the less curious.

Peggy was not so inconsistent. She possessed a firm faith in the mysterious manifestations of the little triangular board under the unconscious guidance of her own fingers. She wished to be told whether her brother would ultimately recover and be like his former self, be the brother she remembered in the years before the war?

However, Charlotta Scherin, although

ordinarily the frankest of the three Red Cross girls, in a point-blank manner declined to divulge her question. She would only confess that the question was identical with the one she had formerly asked, when she had received no answer.

Therefore upon this June afternoon three young girls were engaged in kneeling upon the floor of a dilapidated little wooden house built probably half a century or more before, watching with fascinated interest the movement of the board upon which Bianca and Peggy were at the present moment lightly resting the tips of their hands.

They were kneeling upon the floor because the little house boasted no table and no chairs and they were compelled to employ as a table the seat which ran around the inside of the tiny building.

Charlotta was not touching the Ouija, as she had been given the opportunity to ask the first question.

Lieutenant Harper, puzzled by the behavior of his three companions, although making no inquiry, had seated himself a

few yards away and was watching their proceedings with more attention than he commonly displayed.

But evidently Charlotta was not a favored questioner.

The Ouija continued to trail aimlessly across the fair sheets of paper spread temptingly under it, forming an occasional letter but no word that could be safely read.

Five, ten minutes passed, and then Charlotta, never noted at any time in her life for patience, gave a little sigh partly of relief, partly of chagrin.

"Oh, well, I resign from all future effort to persuade the Ouija board to show any interest in me or my future. But perhaps it is just as well. The question I have twice asked I suppose I had no right to ask at any time. Besides, I doubt if I would have accepted the answer had the Ouija decided differently from my desire, I am so obstinate."

"Yes, I am afraid that is what is the trouble, Charlotta," Peggy answered, on the defensive, as all mistresses of the art of Ouija are apt to be. If you have no

faith and if you are unwilling to accept what the Ouija knows to be the truth, why should your questions be answered?"

"No reason in the world, my dear, so go ahead and ask yours," Charlotta returned.

However, Peggy insisted upon waiting until Bianca had put her test to the powers of the Ouija board. Her question involved a more important spiritual demand.

Peggy's own question had to do with the future, but related to everyday human existence; Bianca's question might only be replied to through a spirit communication.

This time, with Charlotta's fingers replacing Bianca's, the little board moved rapidly across the clean sheet of paper from right to left, spelling two words with each letter so carefully formed there could be no doubt of what the words were.

Yet they afforded no answer to Bianca's questioning.

The words were: "Danger, beware, dander, beware," repeated until they were apparent nonsense.

So intent were the girls, however, upon trying to persuade the Ouija to explain

in further detail what her warning might imply, that no one of them observed that Lieutenant Harper had grown tired of their disregard of him and had gotten up and walked out of the little house in the direction of the river, which was not perhaps more than a dozen yards away.

Charlotta made the discovery first. Already tired of so slow and futile a source of information, besides feeling that she had neglected the young officer who was her special charge, she slipped out after him.

Observing that he had gone directly to the bank of the river which was rushing past with a swift current, Charlotta uttered a warning cry of "Take care!"

Yet the young officer never glanced in her direction. He may have been too deeply overburdened with a depression he had vainly tried to shake off even to have heard her.

The girl saw him leap forward into the river with as little sign of hesitation as if he were intending to swim.

Yet she had no such illusion.

With a cry for help which the other girls, Sonya Clark and even Major Jimmie Hersey heard, managing to take off her low shoes and to tear her blouse away, in order that her arms might be free, the little Countess with her usual recklessness plunged in after the young officer.

To the onlookers it appeared impossible that either of them could be saved.

CHAPTER XVI

A New Situation

SEVERAL days later, lying outdoors in a wheeled chair in the garden of "The House of the Golden Wish," was the young Countess Charlotta Scherin, wandering up and down in front of her like a sentinel, Major Jimmie Hersey, looking a good deal more vigorous than in many months past.

Seated at a little distance away was Miss Susan Pringle with a large basket of darning by her side upon which she was working industriously, save when she turned to gaze with an expression oddly compounded of relief and distraction at Charlotta.

The young girl was apparently half asleep, as her eyes were closed and her singularly long black lashes were resting against her white cheeks; her usually brilliant color having for the time being disappeared.

A few moments later, however, lifting her

eyelids, she surveyed her companions with a smile and then sighed deeply enough to attract the attention of Major Hersey.

"Please come and talk to me," Charlotta invited plaintively. "I am so unaccustomed to being an invalid even for a short time that I cannot enjoy it as one should. In the first place, I am not exhausted by my effort, as Dr. Clark insists I am and must be, because I made little effort after all. The real exertion was yours, Major Hersey. Do let us discuss all that took place. It won't upset my nerves; nothing upsets my nerves like not being permitted to do as I wish, and I wish to ask a number of questions. First, how did you chance to appear in so magical a fashion a few moments after what came so near being a tragedy due to my neglect? If Lieutenant Harper had not been rescued I should always have felt my own responsibility, since I had insisted upon looking after him."

"Well, I do not think you have anything to reproach yourself with on that score," Major Jimmie replied, looking with a glance of poorly concealed admiration at

his companion. "I have been a soldier a number of years, but I never saw anything pluckier upon a field of battle than the fashion in which without an instant's hesitation you plunged into the river after Harper. I don't see myself why you should not discuss what happened, as it would be a relief to you.

"I knew you three girls had gone for a walk alone with Lieutenant Harper, because Mrs. Clark had spoken of the fact and of being uneasy about you. She had left word that Timothy Brackett be found and sent after her, as he was more accustomed to Harper than the rest of us. But when Brackett did not turn up as soon as I thought necessary, I made up my mind to act as a poor substitute. So I set out after Mrs. Clark, making no special effort to hurry until I had almost reached the little summer house. Then I did make an effort to join her so as to explain my purpose. Therefore I was pretty close at hand when the whole thing occurred. At first I did not see Lieutenant Harper, but I did see you and heard Mrs. Clark cry out what

you had done. I confess at first I did not feel much hope for any of us. Here I was a semi-invalid, the river with a swift current which would bear you both along more rapidly than I could swim after you. Yet before I had taken the plunge, fortunately for us all, I discovered your intention. May I say it was one of the cleverest, quickest appreciations of a situation I ever witnessed? You would make a good officer, little Countess."

"Oh, there was nothing else possible and I understood this before I reached Lieutenant Harper. In fact, as soon as I got to the river bank I saw that at no great distance away some logs had jammed together in one of the bends of the river bank. There were overhanging branches from the trees along the shore not far from the jam of logs. I had to swim strenuously to reach Lieutenant Harper; that was the most difficult task; but I have been swimming for as long a time as I can remember and I have saved some one before, so I knew pretty well what to do. Lieutenant Harper had gone down twice when I got

hold of him, so fortunately for me he was too weak to make a struggle, and I allowed the current to take us both along, swimming with the stroke that would drive us toward the shore line and into the jam of logs. What we were to do after we reached there of course I did not think. I only realized I might be able to hold myself and Lieutenant Harper up out of the water until help would finally reach us. And you came sooner than I dreamed help could come. After all, you saved us both."

"Nonsense! Do be truthful, little Countess, if you do wish to flatter me," Major Hersey responded almost irritably, in spite of Charlotta's appealing manner and position. "Mrs. Clark did as effective work as I, and Brackett himself arrived in time to help us revive you and get you back to the house."

"Yes, but you climbed out onto the logs and reached me when I felt I could not hold Lieutenant Harper another instant, my arm had become so frozen and lifeless. Then you dragged him to land, I have never known how you managed, while Mrs.

Clark, Bianca and Peggy struggled to help me. It was Bianca who tore down the old grape vine from over the summer house and used it for a rope. But suppose we do not talk of these last moments; they were trying, I confess. Only I decline to be regarded as a heroine, and I wish to warn you, Major Hersey, that if I find anything like that happening to me, I intend, as you Americans say, to run away. Won't you be hero to my heroine?"

Jimmie Hersey smiled and shook his head.

"I am sorry if you object to the position, because heroine you are here at 'The House of the Golden Wish.' And all the effort in the world you may make to turn me into a hero upon the same occasion will never succeed. I may have my chance some other time. Remember, I returned with dry clothes, while you were drenched as a little wild bird that had been caught in a storm without a shelter."

Delicately flattered by Jimmie Hersey's manner and words, although certainly not taking her own action seriously, Charlotta's

cheeks displayed a little more of their accustomed rose.

"Oh, well, after all, one thing for which I rejoice was accomplished; and how strange that it should have been in so unexpected a way! Peggy Harper came to me this morning to thank me for what I had done both for her and for her brother. She says that her brother is so like himself that she has even been able to tell him she doubted his real identity. They have had a long talk; Lieutenant Harper now realizes how ill he has been since the war and how nearly Peggy came to being almost worse than alone. She even told him about their affairs. They seemed in a hopeless tangle. Personally I think Peggy ran a good deal of risk, but she is rather a helpless little thing. Dr. Clark says, however, that the shock is what has had an almost miraculous effect upon Lieutenant Harper. Of course you know Dr. Clark has always believed that Lieutenant Harper was recovering slowly and struggling to shake off the depression which kept him so silent and uninterested, when actually he knew what was

taking place about him better than the rest of us understood. It was because the depression seemed utterly unendurable that he decided to do what he finally did. It was not a sudden idea; he had been thinking of it for weeks. But now Lieutenant Harper has assured Peggy she is not to worry, that he will never do so mad an act again, and if for no other reason than because I so nearly lost my life in an effort to save his. He insists it is the realization of this fact more than the shock of drowning that has brought him to his senses, but of course one cannot tell. I am only glad that my attempt as a Red Cross girl to be of use to Lieutenant Harper has not altogether failed. I confess when I studied the various methods one was to employ to aid the soldiers who were suffering from nervous breakdowns, rescue from drowning was not mentioned."

At this moment, getting up from her chair and advancing with an undarned sock in her hand, Susan Pringle joined her charge.

"Major Hersey, I do not mean to be

rude, as I am sure you appreciate, but I fear Charlotta is talking too much. She has been told by Dr. Clark to keep as quiet as possible. I would have preferred her remaining in bed, but she declared she would be happier out of doors. After what has occurred I think we had best return to Luxemburg within a few weeks instead of months. The fact is, I no longer feel able to chaperone Charlotta if she is to do such reckless things as she will insist upon doing."

Thinking the sock in her hand was a handkerchief, Susan Pringle put it up to her eyes to wipe away a few tears.

"She might so easily have been drowned, Major Hersey, and then I should have been left alone to face her father and aunt. After all, she is an only child and they must be fond of her, even if they have had difficulties in the past, due partly, I am sure, to Charlotta's own self-will."

"There, Susan, don't cry and don't try to destroy my reputation with Major Hersey. What would you have had me do, allow poor Lieutenant Harper to drown

while I stood by and cried in a sweetly feminine fashion? At least you have scolded as if this was what you wished. But as for returning home in a few weeks, Susan, you may go if you like; but I shall remain here at 'The House of the Golden Wish.' In fact, I think I mean to live always in the United States. As for my father and aunt, they are really having a comfortable life for the first time in years!"

Charlotta made a funny little face.

"Am I such an impossible person after all, Major Hersey? But at least, Susan Pringle, I at last have succeeded in making Mrs. Clark like me. She came in to see me this morning and said lovely things to me, that if she formerly had thought I was too impulsive, after all, I was—but I can't repeat what she really said. Anyhow, she thinks I may turn out to be a worth-while person. She has had such a wonderful life herself I am sure her influence and her opinion must count for a great deal. So if you desire to desert me, Susan Pringle, to go and live a stuffy little dull existence in an English lodging house, Mrs. Clark will

keep me with her and let me go to boarding school next winter with Bianca. But of course you must *not* leave me unless it is your own wish, Susan."

Susan Pringle, who was madly jealous of Sonya's influence even before Charlotta's little speech, capitulated at once.

"Nothing will make me leave you, Charlotta, save death itself, as you well know," Susan announced, returning to her basket of stockings and forgetting that her intention had been to end Charlotta's extended conversation.

However, Major Jimmie Hersey had not forgotten.

"I am going to leave you now to rest. I hope I have not overtired you," he announced. "Is there anything I can do for you before I go?"

Charlotta frowned.

"I told you that I did not wish to be left alone, and that I preferred having some one talk to me," she announced imperiously. "If you simply prefer spending your time with some one else, why not say so frankly? You know I dislike persons who are not candid."

She looked so pretty and angry that Major Hersey could not resist a little human revenge.

"Well, I did wish to speak to Miss Jamison a few moments if I can find her alone. She is always so busy. I have had a piece of good luck. I sent the little book on military tactics I have been trying to put together upon Miss Jamison's advice to one of my old teachers at West Point, who is now a distinguished lieutenant general. I have just received a very kind letter from him in reply."

"I suppose you would never be willing to show me the letter," Charlotta said, her tone suddenly humbler.

"I don't know," Major Hersey answered; "perhaps if you will be good and rest and do what you are told, some day I may."

CHAPTER XVII

Mount Vernon

THE Fourth of July was a gorgeously clear, hot day. There was not a cloud in the serene blue of the sky, scarcely a shadow on the lawn save those cast by the trees.

Drawn up before "The House of the Golden Wish" were two large wagons and an old-fashioned carriage. Every member of the household was to drive over to Mount Vernon, but a few miles away, to celebrate the national holiday at the historic home of the first President of the United States.

There was to be an important celebration in honor of the day, with speeches made by a number of distinguished men.

It was Colonel Churchill's idea that both the soldiers and the Red Cross girls should see Mount Vernon as one of the greatest treasures of the Capital, although situated a few miles outside of it upon the banks of the Potomac River.

Dr. and Mrs. Clark, Nona and Captain Martin, Bianca, Charlotta and Peggy Harper were to drive in the carriage with Colonel Churchill, the others coming over in the wagonettes.

As a matter of fact, Bianca and Charlotta had both suggested that they accompany the larger groups, allowing their places to be given to the older Red Cross nurses, but Sonya had expressed the wish to have them with her.

Bianca had not been particularly well since the news of her mother's death, which had affected her even more seriously than Sonya had anticipated. However, for Bianca it meant an absolute closing of the early chapters of her life, the greater part of which it might be wiser to forget. In those days she had loved Donna Elizabetta, her foster mother, and Eugino, her foster brother. Her own mother she had been unable to love, and although she had been fond of Paulo Zoli, it was perhaps as well her attachment had not been deeper, since he showed no further affection or interest in her.

As for Sonya herself, Bianca felt even more strongly the increasing tie between herself and Sonya Clark. There was no one in whom to confide what had occurred except Mrs. Jack Martin, who had been Nona Davis and was in Italy with "The Red Cross Girls and the Italian Army."

There was beside only Carlo Navara who might be interested. But as he already had started upon his concert tour in the West, Bianca begged that Sonya write him, sparing her the ordeal.

Of late it was true, as Charlotta had suggested, that Sonya Clark had reversed her attitude concerning Charlotta Scherin as a Red Cross girl. In fact, during the time of Bianca's depression she had herself confided in the little Countess, asking her aid toward cheering the younger girl.

If Charlotta was now and then downhearted she did not betray the fact to many persons and was always generous and sweet with Bianca.

This morning, as a matter of fact, Charlotta actually had been crying in her own room for a few moments and teasing and

troubling Susan Pringle by absolutely declining to say what was the cause of her unhappiness.

Now in the carriage with her friends apparently she had not a care in the world.

The drive to Mount Vernon was only a short one along a dusty midsummer road shaded with ancient oaks and beeches. The gates entering the grounds were to-day wide open, although with a guard at either side, in honor of the many guests who were expected. Mount Vernon is sixteen miles from the National Capital and although connected with Washington by a railroad, the larger number of visitors for the day would probably arrive in motors.

In order that his guests, as he regarded the members of the family of "The House of the Golden Wish," should see the grounds and house at Mount Vernon before the arrival of the crowd, Colonel Churchill had suggested that they start several hours earlier and arrive at Mount Vernon before noon. The speeches would not take place until the afternoon, so most persons would not appear until after luncheon.

"Have you seen Mount Vernon before, Mrs. Clark?" Colonel Churchill inquired, and when Sonya shook her head, saying that she was ashamed to confess she had not, the older man added,

"Well, I have traveled a great deal in a long life and have seen many historic homes dedicated to the memory of great men. But no one of them seemed to me to possess the beauty, the simplicity and the quiet, deeply ingrained dignity of Mount Vernon. If you will pardon an old man, I will quote what Edward Everett said of it: 'While it stands the latest generations of the grateful children of America will make this pilgrimage to it as to a shrine; and when it shall fall, as fall it must, the name of Washington shall shed an eternal glory on the spot.' I think you can understand therefore why I wished every soldier from 'The House of the Golden Wish' to visit the home of the first American General, the man who did more than any other individual to give them a country worth fighting for. But there, I must not fall into the habit of making a speech when I am merely

talking to friends. Fortunately you will hear some really great speakers later in the day."

Mount Vernon in Washington's day had an estate of eight thousand acres; to-day the "mansion farm house," as it is called, stands in about ten acres of beautifully kept lawn with a collection of magnificent trees and a box hedge such as can be found nowhere else in the United States.

"How simple the house itself is!" Charlotta exclaimed, as the Colonel's guests were dismounting for sight seeing. The house purchased by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, is now a museum devoted to memorials of Washington and his family.

Wandering about from one room to the other, Charlotta managed to find herself alone in a room with Bianca.

"Bianca, dear," she said with even greater earnestness than usual, "will you try and stay with me as much as possible to-day? I have a very special reason for not wishing to be alone at any time."

Puzzled, nevertheless Bianca nodded agreement.

"Of course I am happy to be with you, Charlotta, yet if you are hoping by this method to avoid some one's else society I don't believe you will be successful."

The house with its exquisite old Colonial furniture, as beautiful as can be seen anywhere in the world, the portraits and representative state papers of past generations having been admiringly examined, the group of sightseers went out upon the piazza extending the entire length of the house and facing the Potomac River.

"We must walk for a short distance outside the grounds in order to eat our luncheon, as the authorities prefer no one should picnic here. By the time we have finished the crowd will have begun to arrive," Colonel Churchill explained, leading the way toward the river and followed by as many as forty or more guests.

Having insisted that the responsibility for the luncheon should be his, he had ordered a Washington caterer to assume full charge. And Colonel Churchill's luncheon was as complete in every respect as if his soldier guests had been ambassadors from foreign lands.

Several large tablecloths were spread upon smooth and perfect green stretches of ground; there were half a dozen waiters to serve and every variety of cold food, salads, sandwiches, cakes, ices, cold and hot coffee, and an enormous bowl of fruit punch.

"Think of being able to eat such wonderful food, Charlotta, and at the same time to look at one of the loveliest views in the world," Bianca murmured. "I read somewhere that the name 'Potomac' is an Indian word and means 'people who come and go.' I think most of us can come under that definition these days. I wonder how many states and countries the people who are together here represent? Sergeant Morris," Bianca turned to the young man who was standing just behind her, "are you not proud of your ancestry to-day? Robert Morris and Washington were great friends, were they not, and neighbors in Philadelphia?"

The present Robert Morris smiled.

"Yes, I am proud, and after Colonel Churchill's lecture some weeks ago I have

been ashamed of my own failure to appreciate my blessings and have been working so that my ancestors may not be ashamed of me. If you have finished your lunch, won't you walk down toward the river with me and let me tell you of my plans?"

A moment Bianca hesitated; she had promised not to leave Charlotta alone, yet she could scarcely be regarded as alone surrounded by dozens of friends. Moreover, Robert Morris was an especial friend of hers and to refuse his request in the presence of so many persons would be most ungracious.

A little later, returning to her former place, Bianca discovered it occupied by Lieutenant Harper. Since the young officer's recovery and Charlotta's heroism in his behalf he had made no effort to conceal his admiration and his gratitude.

"I am expecting to be well enough to leave 'The House of the Golden Wish' in another few weeks," Bianca overheard him announce. "Our affairs in Tennessee are so muddled that the sooner I arrive to try to straighten them out the better. But

one piece of good luck, Timothy Brackett has promised to come along with us. He is anxious to get away from city life and try his hand at farming, and the one thing Peggy and I still own is land. I have never had much love for farming myself, but Dr. Clark advises that I lead as much of an outdoor life as possible for the next year and let the law get on without me. So I have persuaded Brackett to go on with his agricultural studies and at the same time try a few practical experiments on some of our surplus land.

"The truth is I am everlastingly grateful to him for befriending Peggy and would like to do whatever I can to show our gratitude. Peggy in New York City without friends and without money and yet safe and restored to me is cause for gratitude. But I want to ask you, to whom perhaps I am even more grateful, if I have no way of showing it, if perhaps you will come down to Tennessee and make Peggy a visit? We own an old farmhouse where Peggy and I are intending to live and after a few months of getting it in shape, I think we could make you and Miss Pringle comfortable."

"You are wonderfully kind," Charlotta answered, "and perhaps if I don't return home sooner than I originally planned I may be able to accept. You see, I am very fond of Peggy and was thinking if you had not appeared that perhaps I might have tried adopting her as a younger sister. I have always wanted one."

This moment observing that Bianca wished her former seat, Lieutenant Harper was obliged to give up his place, although his reluctance was evident.

As a matter of fact, Bianca later forgot Charlotta's wish, so completely was she in the dark concerning the reason for it. Yet when luncheon was over and they were hurrying to secure seats in order to hear the speakers, Bianca found Charlotta not only close beside her, but with one arm tightly clutching her own.

"I am not well, Bianca; please don't speak of this to any one, but will you stay with me outside the crowd? Do be careful that no one else notices, it is not in the least serious."

"Just the same I think I had better speak

to Sonya," Bianca answered. Charlotta had not been as strong since her splendid effort at rescue, although insisting that she was in no way affected.

A little later the two girls found themselves in an enchanted spot at some little distance from the throng of spectators who had gathered to hear the orators of the day. They were under an old oak tree with a high wall of box hedge concealing them on one side and a great bed of red and yellow roses at no great distance away.

The day was so warm and the earth so dry that Bianca was lying at full length on the ground; above her Charlotta was perched in a low fork of the tree.

The girls were startled by the sudden appearance of Major Hersey.

"Little Countess, I have been trying to find an opportunity to speak to you alone all day. But you have avoided me."

He turned to Bianca.

"Am I asking too great a favor to suggest you leave us alone for a few minutes? If you will walk over there by the rose garden, I won't be long."

Charlotta smiled but remained silent. Bianca glanced up at her friend.

"It is as you wish, Charlotta. Shall I go or stay?"

Charlotta had flushed, yet Bianca was surprised to hear her say in a tone of unaccustomed meekness, "Go, if you will, please, Bianca."

A moment later Major Hersey, with head uncovered, was pressing the friendly hand which the little Countess had stretched down to him from her tree-hammock.

"I can't and won't have you continue to misunderstand me in this fashion," he announced in firm tones. "In fact, I can scarcely believe you do misunderstand me, it seems so incredible."

"There is nothing incredible and there is nothing to misunderstand," Charlotta returned. "I do understand perfectly. I have been too frank in showing that I liked you and you have been equally frank in letting me know that you felt differently to me. I am sorry, yet I can see no harm in either. I suppose I ought to realize that frankness is a mistake, yet it does not seem possible for me."

"Yet it does seem possible for you to be obstinate and slightly stupid, little Countess," Major Jimmie returned in a voice and manner not polite, yet one which was apparently capable of creating respect, since Charlotta made no rejoinder.

"You must understand the situation. You know I care for you more than you can appreciate. In fact, I have cared since I saw you for the first time coming toward me in your own home in Luxemburg, and then of course a great deal more in Coblenz, and more still, if it were possible, since our unexpected meeting at 'The House of the Golden Wish.' But conditions have not changed since I said good-by to you before; I remain a poor army officer and you a Countess and not a poor one, although you have no great fortune, thank Heaven!"

"Why should you be grateful for that?" the little Countess asked, and Major Jimmie was unable to reply.

"I don't see why you must remain always a 'poor' army officer," she added a moment afterwards, "I thought you intended some day to become a very great one. As for

money, I know army officers are never very wealthy and that is why I am glad I have a little fortune in my own name that my father can do nothing about. Besides, what does being a Countess amount to these days, when Kings and Queens and Princesses are disregarded? Sometimes since I have been in the United States I have felt that perhaps I am the most democratic person in the country. After all, isn't it more important to be a Red Cross girl than a Countess, unless one can be both?"

The little Countess smiled to relieve the seriousness of her companion, who paid no attention to her efforts.

"Don't you really in your heart, Major Jimmie, believe that human beings only count because of what they are able to do and be themselves, and not because of what other people have done for them?"

This was too straightforward Americanism to dispute. Major Jimmie nodded.

"Then you simply do not consider that I will ever be able to do or be anything worthy of your liking?" the girl added.

"Charlotta!" the young officer answered

sternly. "One thing, I would never marry a girl whose father would object to the marriage and would not consider me worthy of being his son-in-law."

"Then I think you have little proper spirit and a great deal of false pride, Jimmie Hersey. But if you have me in mind, my father would be delighted to have an American son-in-law. He has said as much; in fact, any son-in-law who would make me obedient and well behaved. Would it be too hard work?"

"I think I could undertake that end of it," Major Jimmie answered. Then a little later: "See here, Charlotta, in a few weeks I am going away from 'The House of the Golden Wish.' I am going West, where I intend to get completely well. At the end of that time I am coming to look for you wherever you happen to be in the United States or in Europe. If you still think you care for me I shall see your father, explain my position and find out his point of view. I don't say I shall abide by it, but I'll find out. In the meantime you are to be absolutely free. You are the kind of girl nearly

any fellow will be crazy about and although you are over twenty-one in many ways you are younger than Bianca Zoli and can't really know your own desires. I am four or five years older, and you can be sure there is no doubt of my feeling. I shall never change."

"I don't think we ought to keep Bianca waiting alone any longer, Major Jimmie," Charlotta murmured with a meekness of tone she reserved only for the young officer.

Yet when Bianca had joined them she added in a fashion that was far more characteristic:

"Bianca is my best friend, Major Jimmie, and we are both Red Cross girls, so you won't mind my confiding to her, will you, that either I am engaged to you, or you are engaged to me? We don't seem to be engaged to each other, because we are to wait another year to find out and in the meantime no one else is to know. Now let us go back and hear the last speaker."

However, the speaking was about to close and the young American officer and two Red Cross girls only arrived in time to

listen to a quotation from the greatest speech in the English language: "That from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion: that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain: that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

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